



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

BILLS

**Aged Care Legislation Amendment
(Emergency Leave) Bill 2020**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 13 May 2020

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 13 May 2020	Source House
Page 52	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Claydon, Sharon, MP	Question No.

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (13:20): I know that there is just a limited opportunity to speak on this bill, the Aged Care Legislation Amendment (Emergency Leave) Bill 2020, so I will try to keep my comments very brief. I am delighted to speak in support of this amendment. As my colleague the member for Franklin made very clear, it is an important amendment that will assist families, particularly those who have taken people who are otherwise permanent residents in aged-care facilities home. I've got many such examples in my electorate of Newcastle. So these are really sensible amendments that will take that terrible financial burden off families who have made those difficult decisions about how best to care for their loved ones during this COVID-19 pandemic. This legislation will provide for a level of flexibility not just for COVID-19 but also for any future emergencies that we might face, such as floods and bushfires and natural disasters, which unfortunately we're all too familiar with in Australia.

Without going into the detail of this bill, the current legislation only allows permanent aged-care residents to have up to 52 days of non-hospital-related leave, otherwise known as social leave, in any financial year. When that limit is exceeded, the cost is borne by the resident or their family members. This was the situation that faced my constituent Jennifer, who contacted me to say that she had made the decision to take her 92-year-old mother out of residential aged care and care for her at home throughout the pandemic. She did not want to take her back to the aged-care facility whilst the virus was active. She was just about to hit that 52-day limit, the social leave cap, when she reached out to me. She and her family were just simply not in a position to be able to pay \$230 a day to hold a place in that aged-care facility. This was the most diabolical and wicked of problems for any family to solve.

I reached out to the minister's office. I've had fabulous assistance from the shadow minister. I really thank the member for Franklin for her negotiations on this issue. This amendment is going to release the massive pressure that's on Jennifer's family and many others in our community right now. When I did flag with Jennifer that I thought there was some good news coming—that we were very hopeful following our discussions with government—she broke down into tears and couldn't have been more thankful. It's moments like that when you realise the profound impact that lawmaking in this place has for people and their lives. So we're delighted to be able to support this measure.

Aged-care providers have been impacted by and are under incredible pressure from the COVID-19 pandemic in the same way as families have been. I entirely associate myself with our shadow minister and other Labor members when speaking to this bill and expressing their heartfelt thanks and appreciation of the extraordinary work done under incredible pressure by aged-care staff and management. Indeed, I want to give a special shout-out to Viv Allanson, the CEO of Maroba care in my electorate, who since day one has played a very strong leadership role in our community. She was incredibly diligent about infection control. She was watching very closely what was happening not too far away in other aged-care facilities and, indeed, what was happening in the US. She was very determined, as I'm sure most of our aged-care providers were, not to allow that to happen in the aged-care facility she was managing.

These are difficult conversations to have with family members. There was some pressure at different times. Families really want to be able to have a lot more access. The Prime Minister made some remarks that left some of my providers feeling very unsupported for a period of time. I needed to reassure them that this wasn't by any means a quick opening up of all nursing home doors. I am very pleased to report that, despite that initial concern about the comments of the Prime Minister and the Chief Medical Officer, providers I've talked to are very happy that the industry and government have now arrived at an agreed code, which balances the rights of families to see their loved ones with the critical need to protect residents from the virus. There's also great appreciation that an opportunity for review has been built into the code.

The costs of compliance and managing visits are incredibly high, so whilst our aged-care facilities are thankful and appreciative of the \$900-per-bed payment from the government, this will not—and we should not pretend

otherwise—cover the incredible financial burden caused by COVID-19 for them. I join with the member for Franklin and other members on this side of the House in calling for expanding the eligibility for the aged-care retention bonus to all workers in aged care. There are people doing the cleaning and laundry work in nursing homes who are currently not eligible for that bonus, and that is not fair. It needs to be corrected.

Finally, on a very lovely note, I was able to establish a penpal club in my electorate that connected residents of aged-care facilities who were feeling isolated with young students who were home schooling. They reported to me great excitement about crossing generational modes of correspondence. Young students are using the very old-fashioned method of writing letters instead of emailing one another. That has provided joy to both young Novocastrians and our elders in aged care. I'm really delighted to have played a small role in facilitating that joy.