

Tabled by: Narelle Gleeson-Henaway
At: Palm Island
Date: 7/9/2020
Signature: [Signature]

Aunty Rachel Opening Comments

- I am here today as CEO of Palm Island Community Company.
- **May wish to insert a brief descriptor of PICC**
*Health + community services
150 staff. 130 P.I*
- Today I welcome the opportunity to speak with the committee members about the proposed amendments to the *Working with Children [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities] Amendment Bill 2021*
- PICC has long held concerns about the Blue card processes.
- We know that the way the Blue Card is currently administered is negatively impacting on our families and communities preventing their ability to exercise self-determination.
- Our current concerns include:
 - Lengthy processing times for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants in comparison to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees of community controlled organisations
 - Lack of information or updates to applicants during the assessment period (which, in addition to lengthy processing times, often leads to employment opportunities expiring prior to obtaining an assessment result)
 - Excessively lengthy appeal process to review a decision through the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (known to be 15 months in some cases)
 - Assessments based on list of offences without any context or consideration of recency of charges (e.g. Elders being declined due to minor, non-serious offences, committed more than 20 years ago)
 - Young people leaving care having difficulty obtaining a Blue Card due to their behavioural record also being considered in the assessment process (e.g., fighting in a residential unit).
- These issues impact on the ability of organisations to staff services and often result in our families being prevented to make decisions about our children's safety, resulting in increased child protection actions.
- The current system has a larger impact on regional and remote Queensland, where there continues to be over policing of communities, housing shortages, poverty and lack of access to legal and advocacy services to challenge decisions.

- The current system therefore is contributing to the ongoing removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities due to barriers experienced by family and community members ('kinship carers') in obtaining Blue Cards.
- We have long been in favour of addressing the flaws of the Blue Card system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- In principle, PICC supports the objectives of the Bill
- We agree the current Blue Card system and its "one size fits all" approach contains significant limitations in upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and is having a negative impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland.
- However, we hold significant concern about the local community mechanisms presented in the Bill for this to occur. We agree that legislative reform to the Blue Card system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants is needed. Therefore, we support the Bill in principle.
- We are concerned that the current framework's reliance on existing Community Justice Groups is insufficient and risky.
- We are also concerned that the Bill is heavily weighted towards employment processes
- We believe equal weighting should be considered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants across the state relating to child protection matters.
- **We believe the bill would be stronger** if it included the following:
 - a system that considers assessments on a case by case basis, which is in better alignment with the intent of the Bill to engage a more equitable and informed process of elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members '*vetting the individual applicant based on their intimate knowledge of their character and the circumstances of each case*'
 - We believe that the state government should undertake a significant community level consultation and discussion with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the state, seeking local level input to develop the right decision-making mechanisms that would lead to meaningful reform.