



Speech by

Peta-Kaye Croft

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

Hansard Tuesday, 23 November 2004

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILD GUARDIAN AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (3.38 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Amendment Bill 2004. The protection of our young Queensland children from abuse, in particular sexual abuse, is a priority for this Beattie government and indeed every member of this House. In 2001 the Working with Children Check or blue card was introduced by the Beattie Labor government. By screening people working in child related employment, volunteers working with children and people involved in the running and management of child related businesses, the blue card system has significantly reduced the opportunities for child sex predators to prey on young children.

People applying for a blue card are screened for a criminal history clearance by the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian—an independent agency. Currently in Queensland, more than 291,000 people hold a blue card. The provisions in this bill ensure that the safeguards protecting children through the blue card system are expanded and strengthened. The bill provides that people working or volunteering with children, including religious representatives, non-teaching school staff, child accommodation service providers, school crossing supervisors and people involved in sporting programs and camps for children will now have to apply for a blue card. As a result of the changes presented in this bill, about 70,000 people who do not currently need a blue card will need them.

The bill also implements the four recommendations regarding non-teaching employees made by the ministerial task force on the sexual abuse of children in schools. Of those recommendations, the changes in this bill include that non-teaching staff employed before 1 May 2001 will now be required to hold a blue card and that non-teaching school staff employed before 1 May 2001 will be required to declare a change of criminal history to the Children's Commissioner.

The blue card system has been recognised as a successful deterrent against potential child predators working and volunteering with children. However, no system, even the blue card system, can be replaced by or work solely without the vigilance of the community, parents and families. The government has established a suite of coordinated child protection initiatives, including education programs, the mandatory notification of alleged harm, early intervention programs, multidisciplinary teams supporting children at risk, and appropriate risk management strategies on the part of employers. Other wide-ranging reforms provided in this bill include enlarging the definition of 'serious offences' affecting a person's ability to successfully apply for a blue card to include an offence under the Australian National Child Offender Register; and enabling the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian to receive and take into consideration disciplinary information from the Queensland Nursing Council, health registration practitioner boards, the Department of Child Safety, and the Department of Communities. It also includes empowering the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian to automatically cancel blue cards when advised of convictions for serious child related sex offences and child pornography offences without asking holders to show cause as to why they should not be counselled. It also allows for clarifying that people in particular child related employment environments need a blue

card if they work or volunteer with children over at least eight consecutive days, at least once a week for a four-week stretch, at least once a fortnight over eight weeks, or at least once a month for six months. It also ensures that our Police Commissioner, under strict conditions, supplies investigative information to the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian even when the investigation does not lead to a charge of an offence.

I strongly believe that these new laws will give children better protection from abuse in its many forms: exploitation, sexual offence, and also neglect. I congratulate the Premier and the ministers. I know that the Premier leads a government committed to address the issues of child protection. I commend the bill to the House.