



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 20 April 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Blue Cards

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.46 a.m.) There are two issues relating to the protection of children that I want to draw to the attention of the House. Cabinet yesterday approved a significant expansion of the Blue Card system to strengthen the safeguards for Queensland children from sexual predators. Stringent standards for people working and volunteering with children will soon extend to groups including more clergy, more non-teaching school staff and people involved in children's sports programs and camps.

The measures include a web listing of valid Blue Card numbers to enable people to check that a Blue Card remains active. Despite calls from some quarters to scrap the need to renew Blue Cards every two years, we will stick with this requirement. I know the measures will not be universally popular, but the vast majority of people and organisations working with children will welcome any moves that improve the safety of children and young people. This is about putting the safety of children ahead of everything else, and I believe that is what any government should do. I urge anyone who thinks our initiatives are too onerous to put children first.

Our improvements include the screening of clergy employed before 1 May 2001—clergy employed since then have already been screened; many more clergy working with children will need a Blue Card; secondly, requiring providers of recreational activities, such as sporting programs and camps, to have Blue Cards; thirdly, requiring homestay providers who accommodate children and young people to have Blue Cards, and requiring staff of hostels for rural children to have Blue Cards.

Requirements for school staff will begin to take effect at the start of the 2005 school year, and they include screening of non-teaching staff employed before 1 May 2001 so that all non-teaching staff will need Blue Cards; secondly, a requirement for non-teaching school staff employed before 1 May 2001 to declare a change in criminal history—this already applied to non-teaching staff employed since 1 May 2001; thirdly, enable the Commission for Children and Young People to notify the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board of the status of suitability notices so that a private citizen with a criminal history cannot shield behind a corporation; and finally, enabling universities to verify the identity of student teachers applying for Blue Cards.

The reforms result from a review of the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2001 plus recommendations of a ministerial task force on sex abuse in schools that followed the report of the board of inquiry into past handling of complaints of sexual abuse in the Anglican Diocese. No government can ever guarantee a bulletproof shield for children, but we are doing our best. The Blue Card system is strong but it will never eliminate paedophiles from society. We must be ever vigilant to guard our children from predators.