



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 22 April 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Blue Cards

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.45 a.m.): I am pleased to table the government's report on the outcome of the review of part 6 of the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000. The employment screening provisions, more commonly known as the Working with Children check, or blue card, set a national and international standard for screening people whose work or voluntary activities involve children. While other jurisdictions such as New South Wales, the United Kingdom and British Columbia have some form of screening available to employers, the Queensland blue card is unique. It covers volunteers as well as employees and is transferable across certain categories of child related employment and volunteering.

A single independent agency, the Commission for Children and Young People, screens each blue card holder to the same rigorous standard. Between 1 May 2001 and 20 April 2004, the Commission for Children and Young People issued 212,103 blue cards. So after just three years of operation, one in 13 Queensland adults has a blue card. Importantly, 90 people have been denied a blue card and prevented from working with children, 355 people withdrew applications for a blue card when asked to provide supplementary information and, incredibly, more than 4,500 applicants withdrew their applications when asked for more information, more details or more identification information.

We will never know how many children the system has saved from abuse, but those figures show that the blue card is a powerful deterrent to people who may pose a risk to our children. However, there is always more room for improvement, and this review identified a range of ways to strengthen the system. I table the response and I seek leave to incorporate the rest of the details of my ministerial statement in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

I informed the House of these measures on Tuesday.

I have said they will not be universally popular but I must say I have been very happy with the public response.

I'd like to draw members' attention to comments by high-profile basketball coach Brian Kerle, who told the 4BC breakfast show on Tuesday that he is a strong advocate for the blue card.

Brian Kerle said: "I don't think the safety of kids can be taken too far.

"And if I have to send my—and I have three young boys, four, five and seven at the moment—and if I've got to send them on a camp and I haven't got the security, that those people haven't got a blue card, I'd rather not send them."

The new measures include:

- screening of clergy employed before 1 May 2001 (clergy employed since then have already been screened). This means all clergy working with children will need a blue card;
- requiring providers of recreational activities such as sporting programs and camps to have blue cards;
- requiring home stay providers, who accommodate children and young people, to have blue cards; and
- requiring staff of hostels for rural children to have blue cards.

New measures applying to schools include:

- screening of non-teaching staff employed before 1 May 2001, so that all non-teaching staff will need blue cards;
- a requirement for non-teaching school staff employed before 1 May 2001 to declare a change in criminal history (this already applies to non-teaching staff employed since 1 May 2001);

- enabling the Commissioner 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 hide behind the corporate shield; and
- enabling universities to verify the identity of student teachers applying for blue cards.

The blue card is only one component in a suite of child safety initiatives.

It can never replace vigilance on the part of parents, families and communities—but it is a sound system, and it is set to become even stronger.