



Speech by

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COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILD GUARDIAN AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (2.51 pm): I am pleased to speak to this bill because I think it is important and it follows on from previous legislation. The principles and the part that I am speaking on regarding the blue card are very important and give a great deal of comfort to a lot of parents who send their kids along to community organisations.

When the blue cards were first introduced, whilst people agreed with the concept and the principle, some people felt, 'We have given all this time,' and, 'We're squeaky clean,' and so on. Gradually people got over those feelings and saw them for what they are. The blue card is there as a way of endeavouring to filter in the best possible way and provide barriers to paedophiles or people who would do anything untoward to young children. We all agree with the principle of it. It has also assisted a lot of clubs in looking at the way in which they organise their structure, their policies, their rules and regulations as to how children are coached and looked after. The blue card is an important part of that.

A couple of years back I had to get a blue card to work as a mentor for the Catholic Church in education. They asked a number of people if they would mentor different kids in schools. It was quite a pleasant task. We were asked to help this young guy in one of the schools. I remember when I met him I asked, 'What do you want to do?' He wanted to play for the Broncos. I said, 'Mate, we all want to do that.' Some wish we had or had not or whatever. That was his ambition. I said to him, 'Do you go to footy training?' He said, 'Yeah.' I said, 'When is that on?' He said, 'When the bell rings.' He did not know what time it was, just that when the second bell rang that was footy training. He went on to get himself a school based apprenticeship. He is now doing carpentry. I am terribly pleased with that.

Whilst all those who were involved in that mentoring system might have been people who had a bit of experience in life and who had different jobs and positions, we all had to get a blue card. None of us minded because we knew that was part of the process and that it was very important for the absolute safety of the kids. When we think of all the kids who are involved in communities, whether it is through the PCYC, netball, junior footy, Space Pilots, Scouts and all the different groups that are around, the requirement for a blue card adds to the confidence of parents. It probably makes a lot of people realise how much work goes into being a volunteer in these organisations and how much effort is put in by people who administer those clubs. In today's environment those people who are volunteer administrators have to look after so many aspects right through from insurance to blue cards and have systems and processes in place to look after the children and make sure they are safe, secure and happy.

I noticed in the explanatory notes that the bill also covers health services and counselling and support services specifically related to where they operate on their own with a child or where the potential exists to operate on their own with a child. I ask the minister when he is doing the summing-up if he might explain. I presume that includes, for example, paediatricians, child health nurses and so on where there may be circumstances where they are with a child on their own. All those people provide outstanding services. I think it is important for the benefit of the parliament to know what this means exactly. Does it mean everybody has to have the blue card on the basis that they may at some time in the course of their

profession be with a child on their own? This bill also extends the definition of some of those services, particularly the health service.

I think I am correct in saying that a lot of business organisations are not community type organisations such as taxi services, shopping centres and so on and so are not required to have blue cards. The famous issue was brought up of Santa Claus and so on. I think—and the minister might refer to this, too—that they are required under their insurance process or risk management assessment processes to have those sorts of aspects covered. I am not sure whether it is compulsory or voluntary for them to introduce a blue card system. Many people in the course of their work and jobs are involved with children. For instance, sometimes taxi services have to take kids from A to B and so on. I think it is important to know that the kids are safe in all sorts of environments.

Some of my colleagues on this side of the House have spoken about the need for photo ID. I think it is important that the blue card system is efficient in how it works. I think it is important that the process of getting a card can be one that does not deter people from volunteering and helping with clubs and organisations. But it also has to be efficient enough that it works to its maximum effect. People sometimes say that a blue card shows those who do not have a criminal record or have not committed an offence before. However, it is a filtering system; it does offer a certain amount of barrier protection. I certainly hope it has gone a long way to providing a safer environment for children. The addition of that photo ID—and it is pretty simple these days to get that done; it is required for driver's licences, passports and a number of other things—would provide a higher degree of security to ensure the care of children.

My colleague the member for Gregory, who is also our shadow minister for Indigenous matters, spoke in support of what John Howard is doing in the Northern Territory. Whilst there has been a lot of discussion about it, I think it is important that if there are any matters of ongoing sexual predation involving little children in those remote communities, then as a nation we have to face up to it.

We have to approach the situation honestly and not say, 'It's something that has been happening for a long while.' The young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids in some of those communities in the north are just the loveliest kids. They have so much potential. The minister has probably been up to Thursday Island and seen the kids at half-time at footy matches. There are 1,000 Mal Meningas running around. They can throw the ball over their head and behind their back, they can dummy and all the rest of it. They are great little kids.

Although I was talking specifically about the problems in the Northern Territory, I would like to think that all the children in our nation have an equal opportunity to reach their potential in a very happy, very safe and very confident way. I think that is what the blue card is endeavouring to do.

We support this legislation. I hope the objectives that the minister wants to achieve through these improvements can be achieved. I ask that the minister give consideration to the matter of the photo ID, which could bring about—and I am sure it would bring about—a greater degree of security and confidence in the system.