




Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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Record of Proceedings, 30 August 2016

**PUBLIC SAFETY BUSINESS AGENCY AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.49 pm): I, too, pay tribute to my local Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and Emergency Management Queensland. They do a fantastic job in regional Queensland, especially in remote areas where they are community leaders.

I rise to speak briefly to one aspect of this bill—that part pertaining to the transfer of blue card services from the Public Safety Business Agency back to the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. This is of particular interest to many of my constituents who live with their children remotely or very remotely and who rely on live-in assistants in order to allow them to both care for and educate their children while still operating their businesses on their property.

While I have nothing but praise for our wonderful School of Distance Education and the job it does in delivering education to the children of outback Queensland, there is no doubt that their parents and carers have a formal involvement over and above that required by urban Queensland parents. These same parents are also working in a part of Queensland where their own work responsibilities are extensive and demanding for both mum and dad. To cope, many property owners rely on the assistance of nannies or tutors to ensure their children are safe and are continuing to progress with their school work while mum and dad are out on the property working day in, day out. Far from being unusual, this is a practice with a long history behind it—going right back to the beginning of the sheep and beef industries in Queensland. For children to be adequately supervised is a necessity.

The introduction of blue card screening extended an extra layer of protection for these families because when a child carer is employed they are literally joining the family. However, for many years hiring of these workers has been disrupted by unreasonable delays in the processing of blue cards. Mum and dad may have found a French university graduate who is happy to take on the tutor's role or even teach French as a part of their backpacking adventure in Australia, but when the person's blue card is not processed promptly the solution evaporates. This is what has been happening for years. Equally, we have situations where local graduates in early childhood education or child carers are eager to return to the bush and have been offered jobs in centres in their own home towns but have been unable to obtain blue cards in time for the start of the school year, and in a couple of cases for the start of term 2. The frustration is increased because these graduates have usually held blue cards for the purpose of student work, but those blue cards are automatically cancelled when they graduate and they have to reapply.

It is obvious that there is always going to be a heavy workload for blue card administrators from December to the start of the school year and if screening is to return to the Department of Justice and Attorney-General I plead with it to be aware of that fact—that is, that it is a lot of red tape at the moment and blue cards are not getting to those people in time for them to start the school year at the end of

January. It is not acceptable for desperate applicants, employers and parents to be told, 'We're having a Christmas shutdown,' and then be told, 'Well, the office has to reopen but now we have a dreadful backlog.' As a person from the land, I say, 'Surprise, surprise!' When the work is on, it is on and you have to be there.

As I said, I have no complaints with the aims and purposes of blue card screening—like most parents, I welcome it—but if it is not adequately funded and given staff sufficient to process applications, and to do so as promptly in peak times as during the rest of the year, then the Attorney-General will fail the scheme. I respectfully urge the Attorney-General to take these issues on board as the legislation places the responsibility for its success back into her portfolio. This is incredibly important for people in rural and regional remote areas. When there are backlogs in getting blue cards, people are not able to be ready for employment in regional towns when the works starts and they cannot continue to wait until the blue card is processed because there is no-one to replace those people. I ask that the application, the screening and the processing of blue cards before the start of the school term is prioritised so that these people can educate our kids in the bush, because it is desperately needed.