




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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PUBLIC SAFETY BUSINESS AGENCY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (4.05 pm): I rise to speak to the Public Safety Business Agency and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. As the shadow minister for child safety, I rise to speak in particular about the amendments contained within this bill that are contrary to the recommendations of the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry in relation to blue cards.

As members are aware, in 2013 the then LNP government commissioned the commission of inquiry, which was chaired by the Hon. Tim Carmody QC, as a far-reaching inquiry into the child protection system in Queensland. Out of the Carmody inquiry came recommendations to improve a system which for too long had been underperforming. We knew that we needed large-scale reform to keep our children safe, and by the time the LNP had left office our child protection system was finally showing signs of improvement.

As part of its terms of reference, the commission examined the oversight functions of the child protection system and recommended a number of changes to improve the efficiency of that system, including changes to the administration of blue cards. Blue cards are fundamentally important to our child protection system. They form our key prevention and monitoring mechanism for people working with children and young people in Queensland. They ensure that those working with children and young people in our state are appropriately qualified and authorised to do so, minimising the risk of harm to children and young people by contributing to the creation of safe and supportive environments.

The Carmody inquiry identified a number of areas in which the administration of the blue card system could be improved. The Carmody inquiry's final report said that Queensland's working with children criminal history check—or blue card system—was repeatedly described as a potential barrier to the recruitment of carers, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The report said that there appeared to be a widespread belief that quite minor offences will deny potential carers from getting a blue card. It said that this belief, along with the requirement for all adults in a household to hold a blue card, dissuaded some potential carers from seeking approval.

According to the report, the department of child safety commented that a lack of personal identification documentation is also a problem in remote communities because, in the absence of such documentation, applicants were required to complete a lengthy and legalistic additional form that can prove to be onerous and complex. The report also noted that problems include insufficient information about blue cards and, for those in remote locations, a lack of support to apply and changes in the composition of large households could cause lengthy delays in obtaining blue cards. As a result, potential carers in those communities felt discouraged. The Carmody inquiry said that the blue card system needed to be simplified and made more efficient.

On 21 May 2014, under the Public Safety Business Agency Act 2014, our government formally established the Public Safety Business Agency. The PSBA Act also authorised the PSBA to perform additional functions, including the operation and management of declared public safety entities. That

includes the state government's protective security service and the Queensland government air service. Importantly, for Child Safety in particular, the Public Safety Business Agency became the lead agency for blue card applications and related processes. That provided greater efficiency and improved a process that for too long had been a hindrance to carers and those seeking to work with children and young people.

Although the opposition will not oppose this legislation in its entirety, it will oppose changes that refer the blue card services to the Department of Justice and Attorney-General from the Queensland Police Service as that would undo a recommendation of the Carmody inquiry. We on this side of the House recognise the importance of the Carmody inquiry to child safety in this state. I want to ensure that the implementation of the inquiry's recommendations is not undone under this government.

We recognise the importance of reviewing and improving our child safety system so that no child is forgotten and so that every child is kept safe from harm. We recognise that the blue card system is an important pillar of the child safety system which means carers and those who work with children and young people are properly accredited to do so. There is no doubt that the blue card system needs improvement to streamline efficiency, but transferring its oversight to the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and ignoring a recommendation of the Carmody inquiry in the process is not the way to do it. It is for these reasons that the opposition holds serious concerns for blue card provisions in this bill and this will be demonstrated when the bill is considered in detail.

I would also like to take the opportunity to send a get well message to my senior sergeant, Mark Anderson, from the Mudgeeraba police who spent the last four days in hospital and in ICU. Get well soon, Mark, and thank you for the amazing job that you do keeping us safe in the electorate of Mudgeeraba. I would also like to thank Senior Sergeant Peter Gordon from Nerang police for the great job you and your team did in apprehending a dangerous criminal in the Numinbah Valley this past weekend. Thank you to Senior Sergeant Andy Frick from Robina police and to your team as well for all that you do to keep us safe.