




Speech By
Jennifer Howard

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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**DISABILITY SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION (WORKER SCREENING)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (4.21 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill 2018 and commend the minister and the Palaszczuk government's commitment to ensuring that Queensland has a robust quality and safeguards system in place as we transition to the full rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

I hold an annual event in my electorate called the Hayden Oration and this year—just a month ago—I had former health minister Neal Blewett speak at the event. Neal was the health minister at the time of the rollout of Medicare and he spoke about all of the issues involved in rolling out Medicare—something we all take for granted now. When I think about the NDIS, I think about Medicare. The NDIS to me is probably the biggest reform we have had nationally since Medicare. It was really interesting hearing him talk about all of the hurdles that they had to overcome in order to rollout Medicare—something that we all enjoy and appreciate and rely on today—and I think it is the same with the NDIS.

These amendments are just one step towards a successful rollout of the NDIS. People with disability deserve nothing less than to have reassurance that they will feel safe in the care of others and be treated with dignity and respect. While Queensland already has strong safeguards in place with the yellow card system, the full implementation of the NDIS in Queensland requires a nationally consistent approach to worker screening which Queensland supports under COAG's intergovernmental agreement.

The first part of this bill enables the sharing of expanded criminal history information by Queensland police with other states and territories to ensure holistic risk assessments can be undertaken. The bill expands the suite of criminal history information shared across jurisdictions to include convictions, spent convictions, pending charges and non-conviction charges and this will enable NDIS screening units to make more accurate and informed decisions when identifying individuals who may pose a risk of harm to people with disability.

The second part of the bill clarifies that sole traders are required to undergo criminal history screening under the yellow card system and requires them to have yellow cards before they can commence providing disability services. Sole traders, as we have heard, will also be required to have their identity verified by a prescribed person such as a justice of the peace, commissioner for declarations, lawyer or police officer.

The bill is important for many of my constituents in Ipswich who live with disability and who are receiving disability support services under the NDIS. It is worth pointing out that the percentage of people in Ipswich living with a profound or severe disability requiring assistance is 7.2 per cent, higher than the state average of 5.2 per cent. Having said that, Ipswich has a fantastic community network of disability service providers who are dedicated and committed to their work—organisations like Focal led by Mickael Blanc and ALARA with Judy Dickson and their teams. They do an extraordinary job in my electorate.

Ipswich was also one of the first regions to rollout the NDIS and, while it has not been without its problems, a nationally consistent safeguards system can only provide benefits for NDIS recipients who are some of the most vulnerable members of our communities and are more likely to be victims of violence, neglect, abuse, exploitation and crime.

In supporting this bill, we are prioritising the safety of people with disabilities and building a culture of zero tolerance for abuse and violence in the disability service sector. However, I do wish to point out that we cannot forget about the many NDIS service providers across the state that are already delivering a high standard of care to people with disabilities, and I particularly applaud the extraordinary work being done by service providers in Ipswich who work tirelessly to provide quality support to people with disability and who are passionate about ensuring all of their clients are treated with dignity and respect and have access to a range of services that help them to enjoy a quality of life equal to those without disability.

As mentioned, Queensland already has a strong safeguards system in place but there are additional benefits that this bill will introduce and I believe most disability service providers across Queensland will welcome these additional safeguards for the reasons that they will strengthen the sector's reputation and quality assurance. For instance, disability service workers at organisations in my electorate like ALARA and Focal will be pleased to know that the bill supports the portability of NDIS worker-screening checks which means that once a worker has been screened they will not have to be screened again if they move to another jurisdiction or employer. For those service providers that are proud of upholding a workplace culture of zero tolerance of abuse, the bill will eliminate opportunities for individuals to make multiple attempts to gain a clearance, ensuring that people who have been knocked back for a clearance in one jurisdiction cannot obtain a clearance in any other jurisdiction.

The bill also acknowledges the emerging number of sole traders operating in the NDIS market and clarifies without a doubt that during the NDIS transition period sole traders must undergo a criminal history screening similar to all other NDIS service providers. Sole traders will also be subject to a no card, no start policy to ensure that they cannot provide disability services unless they have a yellow card or have a current exemption notice. People living with disability have every right to feel safe and be respected and I wholly support a disability services sector that puts the priority on their safety and reduces the risk of harm. I want to thank the minister and the Premier for the work they have done to bring this bill to the parliament and for strengthening Queensland's quality and safeguards framework in preparation of the NDIS rollout. I commend the bill to the House.