




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (3.43 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution on the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill. The Greens support the bill and the broader objectives of creating national information-sharing systems for worker screening. As members have done before me, I want to take a moment as a member of the committee to thank my fellow committee members. I want to give a special thanks to the committee secretariat for the tireless work they do behind the scenes, not just on this bill. Obviously, we are well aware of the very significant work they are doing at the moment in relation to other legislation. I want to thank all submitters and witnesses who assisted the committee, as well as departmental representatives who made themselves available to assist at a number of points along the way.

I also thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network of Queensland for their input. In response to questions about the application of the screening scheme to remote Indigenous communities, they noted that they had not had time to engage with remote, regional and rural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. There has been some discussion in recent years about the way the blue card scheme can disproportionately affect some of the most remote communities in the state. Unfortunately, the committee has not had the benefit of evidence about potential unintended consequences of this new scheme for our most remote communities. As for the blue card scheme, the Greens and I urge the government to make sure that access to clearance under the scheme is not made unduly difficult for these communities, while maintaining high standards in order to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities from abuse.

More broadly, in respect of the NDIS, this rollout is one of the most important issues that people are bringing to me in my work as a local member. The original promise of the NDIS of greater choice and control and a better life for people with disabilities is, as I think we would all agree, playing out differently in different places. We hold some concerns about the marketisation and privatisation of disability support, and it is absolutely critical that governments everywhere live up to that original promise.

It is very encouraging to have heard representations from the department that nobody currently receiving state support will lose out, even if they do not meet eligibility criteria for the NDIS, but people are quite fairly anxious about what this new system means. I would suggest there could be better investment in communication from government to give people the information they need, particularly in light of the complexity of this transition and the significance of the change that is underway for these support recipients. A particular niche is those people who do not satisfy NDIS criteria but have not yet made claims—who do not face concerns or issues as a consequence of disability.

I have had people come to me about several schemes currently funded by the state government that are subject to uncertainty and this is having a real impact on the people who rely on those services. First, one constituent contacted my office with concerns that funding for the Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme would expire once the NDIS commences.

The second one relates to the School Transport Assistance Program for Students with Disabilities funded by the state Department of Education. One constituent who contacted us passed on a letter from the Townsend School Bus Service at Morayfield which provides a state government funded bus for students at the special school. That letter noted that, despite many meetings with the government, they had not been able to get certainty about who would take responsibility for funding this important service. Providers of community mental health support—which are currently funded by Queensland Health—are facing uncertainty as their funding is rolled over on short-term funding extensions, while the situation under NDIS remains unclear.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Member for Maiwar, I would just bring you back to the long title of the bill.

Mr BERKMAN: The simple point is that these are all part of a broader suite of issues that are giving people some anxiety about how we will transition into NDIS and ensure that those services remain available. Let us face it: a lot of people are facing long delays in getting registered and there are months-long delays in the planning process for creating packages. We have to be honest that this is in large measure to do with a desperate lack of funding at a federal level. I commend the bill to the House; it is good work. I thank the committee for the work they have put into it.