




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD**

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**WORKING WITH CHILDREN (RISK MANAGEMENT AND SCREENING) AND  
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (6.13 pm): I stand before the House tonight to make my contribution to the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018—the blue card bill. As we are all aware, Queensland's blue card system was created with the purpose of contributing to the creation of safe and supportive environments for children and young people. We must remember that the blue card screening system is only one aspect of a broad and robust child protection framework existent within this state.

I am proud to say that the blue card bill affirms the government's election commitment to amend the existing blue card system to introduce stricter safeguards for Queensland's children and young people. The ongoing review has and will ensure further improvements to protect our children. Good governments and good governing make no excuses for the review and ongoing development of a system that manages people, their behaviours—past and emerging—their changing circumstances and their changing criminal status.

This safeguard is embodied in the government's no-card no-start election commitment, which introduces blue card application processes to prevent people commencing paid work while a blue card application is pending. The no-card no-start policy strengthens the blue card system by ensuring that all persons working in regulated child related environments have been issued with a working with children clearance prior to commencing work. This will mean applicants can be job ready when they apply for jobs. This will assist employers and employees in this space.

This amendment is consistent with the current working with children act which regards the welfare and best interests of a child as a paramount consideration. The legal effect of the blue card bill prohibits an employer from employing a person in regulated employment unless the person holds a working with children clearance and the employer has notified Blue Card Services that the employer is proposing to employ the person.

To satisfy the notification requirement, an employer will be required to take reasonable steps to verify the employee's identity—for example, by viewing the employee's working with children card, which will include the person's photograph, or another form of photograph identification—and to notify the chief executive. This new requirement builds upon the existing offences which prohibit an employer from employing a person if they know or ought reasonably to know the person holds a negative notice.

It is important to note that there are 740,000 blue card holders in Queensland, which means almost one in every six Queenslanders holds a card. I am pleased to see that, despite the magnitude of bringing such a huge manual system into the 21st century, the automated system will be fully operational by early April 2020.

Through my 23 years as an educator, I have witnessed firsthand the development and improvement of Queensland's blue card system. I also know how invaluable this system is in creating a safe and protected environment for children to experience invaluable services that increase their

wellbeing, such as child care and educational, sport and cultural activities. It is particularly important that employers such as school principals have confidence that a prospective employee is cleared prior to initiating employment discussions. I commend the Palaszczuk government for enhancing the protection of Queensland's children by allowing for more thorough safeguards in the implementation of the aforementioned activities.

It is important to note that the no-card no-start requirements do not extend to police officers and, as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker Stewart, registered teachers who undertake child related work outside their professional duties. This is on the basis that, as we know, they have already been subject to extensive and regular criminal history screening and ongoing monitoring by either the Queensland Police Service or the Queensland College of Teachers.

In addition to further safeguards, the blue card bill also allows for a streamlined and simplified process for a person to make a working with children check application. These reforms give effect to a range of recommendations made by the Queensland Family and Child Commission in its final report on the review of the blue card system. I would like to address two of the key findings made by the QFCC.

The QFCC's first finding indicated the need for a simplification of the existing legislative framework as well as clear and concise information for stakeholders to understand their obligations under the current system. As a result, the blue card bill takes the opportunity to modernise and simplify some of the language in the working with children act. The rewording of the current legislation will ensure that the obligations by persons who are holders of a blue card are met to the highest standard.

The second finding identified by the QFCC has identified the difficulty faced by stakeholders in filling out applications due to their manual and paper based nature, resulting in lengthy process delays. The bill aims to rectify this issue by introducing an efficient, online process to make an application, while also providing a manual option. By providing both options the bill allows for sufficient flexibility based on a person's preference for the form of application.

I note that the development of an online organisational portal is also underway which will assist organisations, particularly large ones, to better manage their obligations under the act. It will further strengthen the blue card system that we have here in Queensland. This position is supported by the QFCC's findings which indicate that Queensland's blue card system is one of the strongest in Australia and since 2001 has enhanced protection for children in regulated environments.

Coupled with the reforms introduced by the blue card bill, Queensland will further strengthen an already advanced set of procedural safeguards and mechanisms to protect children in various activities and services. It is a real shame that we see members of the opposition talking the blue card system down purely for political purposes and contrary to the findings of the QFCC. This is also the very same blue card system that operated under them when they were last in government.

Lastly, the amendments to the government's blue card bill does not rely on an employee's self-disclosure. Knowledge of an employee's history where the prospective employee has worked overseas relies on our international relations, on international and national consistency of practice and on factors outside of our control such as the country's internal processes of record management and information sharing. To communicate otherwise to our Queensland public is irresponsible governing.

I congratulate the QFCC on their final report, and once again I commend the Palaszczuk government for delivering such an invaluable election commitment as the no-card no-start policy implemented in this bill. I commend the bill to the House.