




Speech By
Cynthia Lui

MEMBER FOR COOK

Record of Proceedings, 16 May 2019

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

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (12.28 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. In doing so, I would like to acknowledge and commend the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee. I thank the committee secretariat; the committee chair, the member for Nudgee; and committee members for their hard work and contribution to the examination of the bill.

This bill was initially introduced into the Legislative Assembly on 13 November 2018 and was first referred to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee before it was transferred to the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee on 15 November 2018. On 20 November 2018 the committee invited submissions from stakeholders and subscribers. The committee received 10 submissions in total, one of which commented on both the working with children amendment bill 2018 and the private member's bill, Working with Children Legislation (Indigenous Communities) Amendment Bill 2018.

On 16 January 2019 the committee held a public briefing with the department and a public hearing about the government bill and the private member's bill to hear from invited witnesses. Both bills propose amendments to the issuing of blue cards, although the private member's bill relates only to blue cards in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The policy objectives of amendments to the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 are to give effect to the government's election commitment to amend the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000; introduce automated blue card application processes to prevent people commencing paid work while a blue card application is pending, the no-card no-start election commitment; and implement recommendations from the Queensland Family and Child Commission reports *Keeping Queensland's children more than safe: review of the blue card system* and *Recommendation 28 supplementary review: a report on information sharing to enhance the safety of children in regulated home-based services*, or the supplementary review. Recommendation 28 of the When a Child is Missing report required the QFCC to undertake a supplementary review of legislation, policies and practices relating to information sharing between all parties as responsible agencies for undertaking internal risk assessments and decision-making about the safety of all children in home based care services. The policy objectives will be achieved by amending various aspects of the bill to strengthen the blue card system.

The blue card is an important aspect to protecting the most vulnerable in our society—our children. It is critical for our government to take the appropriate measures to ensure that our children are protected from the various levels and degrees of harm. As members of the 56th Legislative Assembly, it is up to us to support this legislative reform to enforce strong future legislation to uphold the safety and wellbeing of all children living in Queensland. The purpose of the blue card system is to

contribute to the creation of safe and supportive environments for children and young people when receiving services and participating in activities which are essential to their development and wellbeing such as child care, education, sport and cultural activities. The working with children act refers to these core activities as regulated employment and regulated business.

As a working mother of three children, I know the challenges that come with juggling work and family and this often becomes a huge balancing act. My kids went to day care and school, including after-school care, and their love for playing sports had them engaged in after-school sporting activities as well which became part of their everyday norm. Outside school hours training sessions and club games were all part and parcel of their growth and development. As any working parent would know, you want to fully guarantee your child's safety and security at all times in your absence. This is the greatest concern of any parent. Sadly, though, the risk of harm to our children is real and it is up to us as members of government to ensure the right measures are in place to protect all Queensland children.

I would be the first to applaud the selfless work of the hardworking day care workers, teachers, coaches and volunteers who do an amazing job to keep our children safe in their care. I strongly believe that the amendments contained in the working with children bill will help protect our kids. Queensland's blue card helps protect our children through screening people working with children and deeming people ineligible to work with children based on their known police or disciplinary information; monitoring all blue card holders and applicants on a daily basis through an electronic interface with the Queensland Police Service for changes in their Queensland police information; and legislatively requiring child related organisations to implement policies and procedures to manage risks to children.

While we on this side of the House do everything to protect Queensland's most vulnerable through enforcing strong measures through the blue card system, those opposite continue to use fear and scare tactics to undermine Queensland's blue card system. The fact of the matter is the QFCC found that Queensland's blue card system has always been one of the strongest in Australia. The Palaszczuk government made a commitment to implement a no-card no-start policy during the election held in late 2017. Practically, implementation of a no-card no-start rule can only be implemented together with the fully automated system due to come into effect in early April 2020. To do otherwise would place unnecessary strain on the framework.

Unlike those opposite, we do not rush significant reform of this magnitude. Moving a completely manual system with 740,000 card holders to a fully automated system is a significant task. We have listened to stakeholders who have requested that we do not rush implementation of the recommendations because those organisations need to be ready for the automated system also. Protecting some of our most vulnerable Queenslanders—our children—is an important responsibility of all members in this place. This bill will take further steps to protect our most vulnerable Queenslanders who are also the future of our community and this great state. I commend this bill to the House.