




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Record of Proceedings, 15 May 2019

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

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (4.31 pm): As all members on this side of the House know, children and young people are the most vulnerable members of our society. They are innocent and they are trusting. They do not have the strength to defend themselves. Sometimes children are simply too scared to even speak up for themselves. Thankfully, most kids grow up in a world that is safe, but sadly many do not. They can too easily become targets for predators. That is why it is vital that governments do all they can to protect kids.

Sometimes the state is the only hope that our kids have left. Sadly, the record of the Palaszczuk Labor government in child protection last term and this term is nothing short of disgraceful. Time and time again they have failed to properly protect our most vulnerable—our kids. Time and time again these kids continually slip through the net.

All too often the Palaszczuk Labor government has ignored the demands for change. They are good at the rhetoric, but when it comes to following through, the words are usually hollow. They have ignored the LNP's demands for new laws that would safeguard children. They have ignored demands for new laws that would deliver justice for child victims.

I thank the shadow Attorney-General, the member for Toowoomba South, for his work in relation to the blue card bill. I also thank the member for Currumbin, the deputy chair of the committee that examined this bill. They and their teams have worked very hard in relation to the bill and the proposed amendments. The member for Currumbin said so eloquently that this is a bill that should have and could have been debated months before it has been. We on this side of the chamber are shocked by the delay. When we are talking about the state's most vulnerable people, it is important that we get to work and debate this bill in a timely manner.

We know that the tragic cases of children like Mason Jett Lee and Tiahleigh Palmer can never be forgotten. Even today we still do not know the full story of the failures that led to Mason's death. The Child Death Case Review Panel report on Mason is yet to be released—more than two years after it was completed. The murder of—

Mrs D'ATH: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The case that the member is referring to I would caution her about because there are still matters before the court. Importantly, it is not relevant to the blue card system. The blue card system is not in any way relevant to those circumstances. We ask that the member be brought back to the long title of the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Weir): Member for Nanango, please come back to the long title of the bill.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I say to the House that we are awaiting the Child Death Case Review Panel's report on this case. How do we know that it was not relevant to the blue card system? How do we know because we have not seen the report?

We know that the murder of Tiahleigh Palmer was another damning indictment of the system. Her killer was able to foster kids despite a shocking list of convictions spread over 20 years. The blue card system is meant to protect our kids, but under the Palaszczuk Labor government it has been riddled with holes.

It was in the run-up to the 2017 state election that Labor promised to produce a no-card no-start policy. How long ago was that? It was 18 months ago. We do not know why this policy has been delayed for so long. What we do know is that this delay is completely unacceptable. This should have been at the top of Labor's agenda from day one. This was 18 months ago. We would think that the Palaszczuk Labor government would put the kids at the forefront, but we have had that major delay. Instead, the Palaszczuk Labor government has been busy doing other things, like renaming hospitals, when it should have been protecting our children.

In the meantime convicted child rapists and child murderers who have failed to disclose their convictions have been able to work with children. It has been left to the police to notify Blue Card Services of their offences. We know that at the end of last year almost 3,000 people were able to work with children pending the outcome of their blue card application. Most of these applicants would not have had a serious criminal history, but some of them certainly would have. It is those individuals who pose a dangerous threat to the children.

A question on notice in August last year revealed a shocking number of disqualified offenders were able to work with kids as soon as they applied for blue cards. In 2017-18, 21 disqualified offenders were detected. In 2015-16, 25 offenders were detected. It defies belief that the Palaszczuk Labor government has ignored the recommendations of the Queensland Family and Child Commission on this glaring loophole. These people should not be allowed anywhere near a blue card. They should not be allowed to apply for one, full stop. Another question on notice from the opposition revealed that 35 people with disqualifying offences were granted blue cards by relying on eligibility declarations. Of those, no fewer than 23 had convictions for unlawful carnal knowledge or similar offences.

As a parent there is nothing more frightening than thinking that a sexual predator is out there caring for a child. It is unforgivable that under Labor's amendments violent child killers and child rapists can still apply and possibly hold a blue card. We should never, ever allow a rapist near a child. It is unacceptable that a person guilty of child cruelty, torture or strangulation in a domestic setting can apply—

Government members interjected.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: When we are talking about convicted rapists being allowed near our children, we have members of the Labor Party laughing. I do not take that as an interjection. It is embarrassing from those opposite.

It is unacceptable that a person guilty of child cruelty, torture or strangulation in a domestic setting can apply for a blue card. It is the members on this side of the House who have worked with children and who have worked in the real world—whether it is working in law, being in business, working in schools or working in the police force—who understand this. It is those of us on this side of the chamber who know that these people should never be allowed near our children. We should not have to point this out because everyone in this chamber should agree.

The Palaszczuk Labor government needs to explain to parents why a person convicted of manslaughter of a child or torture is allowed to apply to work with children. Labor must also explain to Queenslanders why a person convicted of disqualifying offences overseas could be given access to children. Why did the Palaszczuk Labor government ignore the recommendation of the QFCC for international criminal histories to be considered? Why does the Palaszczuk government never, ever consider these issues?

Labor's refusal to listen is the reason we have kids being left to rot in our watch houses, kids being locked up for up to 40 days, kids breaking down in police stations and even being driven to attempt suicide. The LNP believes that we need to get these kids out of watch houses and we should do it within 72 hours. We know that the Palaszczuk Labor government must back this. It defies belief that our laws to protect—

Mrs D'ATH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The issues that the Leader of the Opposition is now speaking to are not contained in the bill or the amendments circulated by the government or the opposition for that matter. They are not relevant. She should be brought back to the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Weir): Member for Nanango, you have 44 seconds left. Speak to the long title of the bill.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: The LNP would ensure that the blue card system does its job. Blue cards are meant to put a safety barrier between our kids and those who wish to abuse or exploit them, but there are huge gaps in that barrier. Thanks to the Palaszczuk Labor government, we have waited too long to fix those gaps. Now that we are finally acting we should fix every single one of those gaps in the system. We owe it to every single child in this state to finally get this right.