




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.20 pm): I rise to speak on the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. Obviously, as other members in this House have said before me, ensuring the safety of Queensland children is the Palaszczuk government's highest priority. This is why we made a commitment during the 2017 election campaign to implement the no-card no-start policy—the first state government to do so. It is a pleasure to once again speak to another piece of legislation that gives effect to another election commitment. There is one thing that the people of Queensland can be sure of and that is that this government will continue to deliver on its promises.

The bill will introduce automated blue card application processes to prevent people commencing paid work while a blue card application is pending. In addition, the proposed amendments implement recommendations from the Queensland Family and Child Commission's report—the QFCC—*Keeping Queensland's children more than safe: review of the blue card system* and a number of other reviews and recommendations. As the Attorney-General has previously stated, these amendments represent significant shifts for the blue card system. Despite all the pontificating by those opposite, this is a serious issue. This is one issue which I am very happy to know we all agree to introduce.

As Minister for Education, I have a department and schools in my portfolio. They are one of the biggest employers of people who work with children, and this is particularly significant in the area of education. With approximately 740,000 blue card holders in this state, that means about one in six Queenslanders are cardholders and so rushing into changes was not an option for this government. In the development of this bill extensive consultation was carried out with key stakeholders. When it comes to consultation, that is obviously something that those opposite do not readily understand.

As recommended by the QFCC, the Blue Card System Review Implementation Reference Group was established to monitor the blue card reforms. This implementation reference group was consulted in addition to a significant number of non-government stakeholders. I would like to thank and acknowledge the work of the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee and its chair, the member for Nudgee, Leanne Linard, for the thorough consideration given to this bill. If ever there is a bill that needs thorough consideration it is this one, and you can be darn sure that under the chair, the member for Nudgee, and those committee members—from both sides—it received that consideration. This is a reflection of the careful consideration and consultation that informed the development of this bill.

It is important to highlight that just because this bill proposes amendments to the current system that does not mean that the whole blue card system in Queensland is completely broken. We do not rest on our laurels on this side of the House. We understand that if things can be made better, if there are committees and commissions that look at this issue and believe that even though we have one of the strongest blue card systems it could be made even better, that is something that this government

will always be willing to do. I commend the Attorney-General for the hard work that has been done to implement the no-card no-start scheme.

Despite the extensive work that has gone into this bill, I am aware that those opposite think that the government have been too consultative because they complained that the changes have taken too long to be implemented and they would fast-track them. This is not something that we can fast-track. This has a significant bearing on a number of people. We hear from those opposite, 'Blah, blah, blah. You're taking too long. Get moving,' or whatever. There were 81 recommendations in that report that we had to work through and that should not be done quickly. We do not just rush into significant legislative change. We have to do it properly. It has to be considered so we get a balanced outcome because there are people and children who will be affected by the decisions that we take.

When those opposite were in government we saw them bring in a number of amendments. They rushed them through this House. There were High Court challenges on IR; those amendments were found to be unconstitutional. That was great work! The Bar Association told them that amendments keeping sex offenders in jail were going to be deemed invalid, and what did the Court of Appeal do? It deemed them to be invalid. There were a number of other things that they did in government—fast-tracking things—that they got wrong—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Weir): Member for McConnel, pause for a second. There is an awful lot of noise in here. Some of it is cross-chamber; some of it is just chatter. I ask for a bit of quiet.

Ms GRACE: If there is one thing I know for sure it is that when we list for those opposite the amendments and the things they did wrong when in government, they do not like it and they do not want to hear about it. However, they are going to hear about it because when we do things on this side of the House, we do them properly; we do them through consideration. We do not engage in political grandstanding.

Mr Powell: Ha, ha! Even the member for Cooper doesn't believe you on that one.

Ms GRACE: We do not come in here and use cases to demonstrate a particular event. There is no need for the member for Glass House to laugh.

A government member: It's serious.

Ms GRACE: At the end of the day this is a very serious piece of legislation. It is about working together, agreeing which way we go and implementing the best systems we can to protect our kids. As Minister for Education, I know for sure that the Attorney-General has given due consideration to every single issue that has been raised. There is not one that was not explained to us on this side of the House. We have taken a considered approach. We have thought about, looked at and examined all of the unintended consequences. We have consulted, we have taken the advice and we have understood the unintended consequences of some of the amendments of those opposite. That is unlike those opposite, who rush in to engage in political grandstanding. They say things like, 'We're going to have the toughest laws, not only in the world and the universe but also into the black hole that has just been discovered and beyond.' It is just crazy and irresponsible and epitomises the reason they sit on the other side of this House.

The Department of Education has also implemented a number of system changes. It is all right, Mr Deputy Speaker; the member for Gregory will never upset me when I am speaking. I will let a secret out; I actually probably like him too much. We will move on.

The Department of Education has recently implemented a range of system enhancements to proactively monitor while this is happening. The department is looking at how they can reform, how they can do things better. They are training and regional HR teams are producing weekly blue card reports. We have system upgrades because this is going to be an incredibly big job to put what is largely 740,000 manual entries into another computer system. We are ensuring, for example, that new employees who have submitted an application for a blue card cannot be entered onto our payroll system and that new employees who have not submitted a linking form—

Mr Powell: Computer says no.

Ms GRACE:—cannot be entered into DoE's payroll system.

I think I am going through quite a few significant, important things in this speech and it really is disturbing to hear those opposite do nothing but laugh. They think it is so funny. They think it is such a political game when talking about the blue card system that all they do throughout the whole discussion is laugh. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that every single one of them sitting opposite is a man; there is not one woman sitting there. No wonder they see it as a big joke. All the burly men—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Weir): Member for McConnel.

Ms GRACE:—who come to this place—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for McConnel.

Ms GRACE:—who laugh and interject—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for McConnel! I would ask for a little bit of quiet. I would ask the member for McConnel to come back to the long title of the bill and we will all get through this last one minute and 40 seconds very nicely.

Ms GRACE: It is interesting that, instead of listening to the debate in relation to a very significant piece of legislation, all the men opposite can do is laugh. That is how funny it is. If they want jokes, they should go somewhere else. I commend the Attorney-General for providing a number of disqualifying offences—I believe that the Minister for Child Safety investigated the issues surrounding a number of those amendments that arose from consultation. Here they are once again, grandstanding—

Opposition members interjected.

Ms GRACE: You are welcome, it was our idea—just absolutely ridiculous. Members opposite need to get over themselves. They are not that good and that is why they sit opposite. The bill strengthens a number of elements of the blue card system. I believe that this is a balanced approach. We will not accept any further amendments due to their unintended consequences. This bill will provide the best blue card system in the country. The Attorney-General should be congratulated. I am very happy that we have support for the majority of this bill, but from what those opposite said you would not know it. As Minister for Education, I believe this legislation will be among the best in ensuring the safety of children. I commend the bill to the House.