




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (12.54 pm): I am pleased to speak in support of the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This legislation proves that the Palaszczuk government takes the safety and wellbeing of children seriously by strengthening Queensland's blue card system. Queensland has one of the strongest blue card systems in Australia. We have the proud legacy of being one of the first jurisdictions to introduce a working with children check scheme. At the last state election the Palaszczuk government made a commitment to introduce a no-card no-start policy, which would require all individuals to hold a blue card before they can commence work in child related employment. We are delivering on that election promise and by doing so we are standing by the principles of the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act—that is, to ensure the welfare and best interests of a child are paramount and that every child is entitled to be cared for in a way that protects them from harm and promotes their wellbeing.

A child being harmed by someone caring for them undermines the community's trust in institutions that are meant to protect children. In an age of declining trust, it is up to us to strengthen those institutions responsible for protecting the most vulnerable members of our society. The Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 and the reforms to the blue card system have created a system that strengthens that trust. Everyone now accepts as the norm that if you are working with children, either as an employee or a volunteer, you must have a blue card.

With the no-card no-start policy there now is no longer an excuse to not have one while you are employed. As we have heard, there are over 725,000 current blue card holders and applicants in Queensland. This is a great comfort to many families who have entrusted their children to other people's care. I would like to pay tribute to all of those volunteers in my own community, in organisations such as the Girl Guides, the Scouts and the numerous outside school hours care and other organisations that work with children. I know what a difference they make. I pay special tribute to the men who volunteer in these organisations. I know that they often can be scrutinised slightly more than women working with children. Those men who volunteer their time are terrific mentors, particularly to young boys who may not have other positive role models in their lives.

This bill has two objectives: to implement the no-card no-start election promise that we have made to prevent people without a blue card commencing paid work; and to implement the recommendations from the Queensland Family and Child Commission's blue card review report and its supplementary review. The bill is consistent with the QFCC's recommendations and also the national standards being negotiated with the Commonwealth government and other states and territories. It forms the first stage in a series of reforms to the working with children legislation in Queensland and it establishes foundations for other reforms to be implemented over time. There is strong stakeholder support for the no-card no-start policy. We have listened to stakeholders with regard to making sure we have a system in place that can accommodate the new processes outlined in this bill.

The Palaszczuk government is committed and ready to deliver \$17 million over the next three years to implement the no-card no-start scheme, as well as other improvements to the blue card application process such as developing and implementing an online automated application process and an improved alternate manual process. Once this system goes online in late March to early April 2020, the application process for applicants and organisations will become quicker and more efficient. The development of an online organisational portal will also greatly assist organisations to manage their blue card obligations and help them to focus more on child safety and spend less time completing paperwork.

One of the changes the bill sets out is the removal of the requirement for a person to have an agreement to work with an organisation prior to applying for a blue card. This change allows applicants to apply for a blue card in advance of finding employment so that they can show potential employers that they are job ready and have been cleared to work with children. Employers will also strengthen the new blue card system by ensuring that employees must hold a blue card prior to commencing work. Failure to do so will be an offence. This protects children by preventing anyone with a criminal history from commencing work in child related employment whilst their blue card is being processed. Employers and employees will both be liable for offences under the framework with severe penalties imposed on high-risk employees as well as employers who take on high-risk employees. High-risk persons will no longer be able to rely on an exemption under this bill, meaning that volunteer parents or volunteers under 18 who have been otherwise issued a negative notice cannot engage in child related employment.

I am greatly pleased to see this bill establish a register of home based care services. This means that all adult household members of these services will need to hold a blue card and be notifiable to the Department of Education should there be any changes to their blue card status. The LNP may use fear and scare tactics to undermine Queensland's blue card system, but the fact remains that Queensland's blue card system has and always will be one of the strongest in Australia. I commend the bill to the House.