




Speech By  
**Joseph Kelly**

**MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES**

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

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (12.15 pm): I do not think anybody or any political party has a monopoly on being horrified and disgusted by people who harm children. Certainly no party or individual has a monopoly on wanting to keep children safe. I have held positions as a volunteer coordinator, paid and unpaid, in many organisations over many years going back to the 1990s. In the 1990s I would have welcomed a system such as the existing blue card system. It was certainly something that kept you awake at night, wondering whether the volunteers you put into a position of great trust were fulfilling and meeting such trust. When the blue card system was touted and brought forward, I thought it would be a fantastic step forward. We evolved from having no system to having a system of being able to check if people were safe to work with children. This shows that all systems evolve. This bill represents another evolution in the blue card system.

Tonight my children will play touch football with volunteer coaches. Tomorrow night they will go to scouts with volunteer leaders. I will not be there; my wife will not be there. On Saturday we will drop them at music lessons with paid teachers, and of course they go to school every day with paid professional teachers. Like all parents and carers, I at times entrust the care of my children to other people. I am totally in awe of the dedication of volunteers at such groups as Victor Scouts and the Metropolitan District Touch Association. I am always in awe of our paid professional teaching staff in terms of their dedication and professionalism—they have empowered my children to develop skills, gain confidence and build independence—but, like all parents, I know that with independence comes risk. I know that one bad person can inflict a lifetime of damage on my children. That is what this bill is trying to prevent.

Like all members of this House, I support the long and well-established blue card system. I support any sensible changes to improve this system. The proposed changes stem from several reviews and an election commitment by the Palaszczuk government. This is yet another example of this government delivering on its promises.

Ensuring people cannot start work until they have a blue card is a very logical step, as is placing a photograph upon the blue card. Allowing people to apply for a blue card at any time regardless of whether they have an actual job offer—uncoupling the job from the accreditation—is an incredibly important step. I worked for much of my working life in a regulated profession. It was normal for an employer to expect anybody showing up for a job interview as a nurse to provide up-to-date registration papers. It was just an industry standard. Most people would not bother coming to an interview without the appropriate accreditation. Generally there was no delay in starting work; in fact, I went to job interviews and started work within an hour or two of completing the interview because my registration was up to date and I had appropriate qualifications. However, if there were a problem with a nurse's registration it was in the interests of the nurse, patients and the employer that they not start work until those registration issues were sorted out via proper accreditation.

Allowing people to apply for a blue card at any time makes more people who are seeking to work in this industry job ready. I think it will also mean less administration for employers. I have been in situations where people have started work and we have had to track those people, put extra things in place for those people and then follow up. If someone can walk in fully accredited, with a blue card with their photo on it, and be ready for work it will reduce administration. The establishment of a register of home based care services and requirements for adult household members to hold a working with children card are really important improvements. They will certainly lead to greater safety for children. I fully support these measures.

I turn to the opposition's statement of reservation, if I could call it that. To me, again, this is just an exercise in opposition for opposition's sake. We see through the amendments that have been foreshadowed by the Attorney-General that she has listened to a range of voices, has listened to any good suggestions and has sought to incorporate them into the bill. I commend the Attorney-General for listening to people and doing that. Beyond that, the best I could get out of this statement of reservation is that we are going too slow on this change. Just two days ago we were criticised for going too fast; now we are being criticised for going too slow. It seems that, whatever we do, the opposition will criticise it. Opposition members will put forward an argument to fill time and then whinge about not having enough time.

We copped criticism for going too fast in relation to the bill we debated yesterday. I found that surprising, because many of the members opposite were part of the Newman government, which certainly got things wrong when it went too fast in relation to important bills. To see this you only have to look at the failed sex offender laws introduced by the former attorney-general, the member for Kawana. That bill was passed on 16 October. Concerns were raised by Mr Tony Fitzgerald, whom we have discussed in this place many times, by the end of October. On 14 November the Queensland Bar Association wrote to the attorney-general recommending the repeal of the laws. On 6 December the Court of Appeal found that the laws were incompatible with the institutional integrity of the state's highest court and declared the laws invalid. On 9 December the former attorney-general said, 'I'm going to seek some legal advice on that.' By 16 January, just three months into the process, the laws were scrapped. That is what happens when you move too fast.

I commend the Attorney-General for taking the time to get this right. This is complex. This is a massive change in how we manage this system in Queensland. It is extremely important that we get this right. The Attorney-General and her staff are to be commended for engaging with stakeholders so effectively and deeply. Perhaps that is why there was near universal support from stakeholders, as noted in the report.

This bill will lead to greater safety for kids and more efficiency for employers, workers and volunteers. I think it is the greater safety for kids that most of us in this House absolutely support and want to see. I urge those opposite to stop playing politics and opposing for the sake of opposing and to support the Attorney-General's excellent work so that we can get on with keeping kids safe. I commend the bill to the House.