




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (4.39 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. 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 that are essential for their development and wellbeing such as child care, education, sport and cultural activities.

Queensland's blue card system mitigates past, present and future risks to children through: screening people working with children and deeming people ineligible to work with children based on their known police and 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, just as importantly, legislatively requiring child related organisations to implement policies and procedures to manage risks to children.

People with no known police or disciplinary information are automatically issued with a blue card. Where a person has known police or disciplinary information, the chief executive undertakes a thorough assessment which is underpinned by a robust decision-making framework, which is essential. When making a decision about an application, the welfare and best interests of a child are of paramount consideration. The working with children check is one tool in the broader system for keeping children safe.

The bill will deliver on the government's no-card no-start election commitment. On 14 November 2017 it was announced that a re-elected Labor government would introduce a no-card no-start policy which would require all applicants to hold a blue card before commencing work in regulated services. The implementation of no-card no-start is a core safeguard which strengthens the system by ensuring that all persons working in child related environments have been issued with a working with children clearance prior to them commencing that work. This election commitment is consistent with recommendation 20 of the blue card review report, where the QFCC recognised that, if processing time frames can be reduced for applicants with no or simple criminal history, a no-card no-start approach will provide a stronger safeguard and build on the blue card system's long history of mitigating risks to children.

To minimise adverse impacts to jobseekers and employers, the no-card no-start requirement will be accompanied by a suite of initiatives to streamline the blue card application process, reduce processing time frames and assist people seeking paid employment to be job ready by allowing them to apply for blue cards without an up-front link to an employer. This is absolutely essential, before people have an employer to quote or write down. It is very important and contributes to the job growth program of the Palaszczuk government. In addition, the development of an online organisational portal will enable organisations to more efficiently and effectively manage their blue card obligations, including linking and delinking to applicants and cardholders.

The bill also simplifies the provisions in relation to the withdrawal of applications while retaining the ability for the chief executive to withdraw applications in the following situations: when the identity of the applicant cannot be established within a stated period of time; when the applicant fails to comply with particular requests, including for additional information or submissions; or when the applicant is charged with a disqualifying offence.

The bill brings working with children exemptions into line with working with children clearances and imposes a term of three years. This requirement means that police officers and registered teachers will be required to renew their exemption every three years. Compelling exemption notice holders to renew their working with children exemption will allow the chief executive officer to: monitor and maintain quality assurance; modernise and strengthen the identity check process for this cohort through the inclusion of a photograph, which will also reduce the chance of persons fraudulently using another person's card; and obtain up-to-date information about the person and whether they are still engaged in regular employment. Importantly, a working with children application will continue to have no prescribed fee. All existing positive exemption notice holders will be afforded a three-year grace period from commencement to make a working with children exemption application.

The bill will enable communications between the chief executive and organisations to be made through an online organisational portal. All of the current interactions between organisations and the chief executive are authorised under the working with children act. For example, organisations are responsible for notifying the chief executive of each new person's employment with them. In addition, organisations must notify the chief executive about a range of other issues including when an employer or volunteer leaves the organisation. This is self-regulating.

I acknowledge and thank my committee colleagues. I also acknowledge the hard work of our chair, who does an outstanding job. She could almost be working in the Middle East, bringing peace to the world. I also acknowledge the hard work of the secretariat, which does an outstanding job. I also acknowledge all of those people who appeared before the committee or who, just as importantly, contributed in writing in some way, shape or form.

Speaking not just as a member of this chamber but, like many in this chamber, as a proud parent, I know that there is an expectation from our community that we will ensure this legislation protects our children. I am confident that it does. I am proud to commend this bill to the House. I also acknowledge the hard work of the Attorney-General and congratulate her and the department on this outstanding and well-improved legislation.