




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (6.44 pm): I rise today to speak on the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 that we are debating this evening. Madam Deputy Speaker McMillan, like you, I too worked in the education industry in a number of roles for around 28 years. Over that time hasn't education and particularly making sure we look after our students evolved? When I started teaching we ended up having five Sperry computers put down the back of the room. Of course no-one used them because no-one knew how to use them. Time evolved and students were coming to school knowing how to use computers. With the introduction of the internet it became part of our everyday teaching and learning.

As an advisory teacher at one stage, I was setting up minor computer networks and allowing students to dial in to the internet to do research. At this stage I was doing this work at a primary school and one of the teachers was doing some work around birds. Honourable members can imagine what happened when she dialled up the robin redbreast in her class. It certainly was not a bird that came up; it was a whole range of other issues that really presented a lot of concerns in that class. Since then we have seen the education department starting to manage and filter various sites to protect our kids.

In the evolution of protecting our kids we have also had things like student protection training. When I started teaching I never ever thought I would actually have to do training that would teach us to keep our hands off kids so we would not have to consciously make decisions about what we were doing. As a former PE teacher, as honourable members can tell by my sleek greyhound physique—and you yourself are a former PE teacher, Madam Deputy Speaker—I know that—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): Order! Member, I think it is time that you come back to the long title of the bill. Turning back 25 years is probably not relevant to the bill.

Mr STEWART: When it comes to student protection, all teachers as well as any other person who works in a school need to make sure they are working within those student protection frameworks. There were many occasions when we had to employ people who were not teachers such as cleaners, ground staff, facility managers and teacher aides. Those sorts of people would have an interview and we would then be employing them, so they needed a blue card. Once they got the job they would need to apply for a blue card. When we were looking to employ them, as an interim step we would do some active searching as best we could in the background to make sure that their previous employers had no concerns around their behaviours. As you would know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that person would put in their application and it was anywhere from 15 days to 40 days before we actually got a response. Looking back retrospectively, that was placing those kids at risk.

These steps are great steps. What we are doing is making sure that every time parents send their kids to school they do so knowing that there are safety measures in place. This is reflected by Dr Perry, who was the CEO of Queensland Catholic Education, who said that she—

... strongly endorses the planned improvements in processing time lines, supported by the implementation of a new online portal system that we have been advised will likely reduce processing times to approximately five working days.

That is a great step forward. If a school was looking to replace a non-teaching staff member and they were waiting anywhere up to 40 days for the applicant to get their blue card, that presented some problems.

This online portal will speed up that process. More importantly, this says to people that if they are thinking of being employed in an environment with children they need to think ahead and get a blue card. Basically, now there is a five-day turnaround. That is a really good step. If you are submitting an application for a job in a school and you do not have a blue card, you should apply immediately so that when the interview occurs you will have a blue card—problem solved.

These are great steps moving forward and I commend the Palaszczuk government. As a former principal, I can say that sometimes I did not know that a person was okay until the blue card was issued. These are great steps, a great move, a great policy and a great bill. I commend the bill to the House.