




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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**DISABILITY SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION (WORKER SCREENING)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (12.42 pm), continuing: In continuing my contribution to the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill, I would like to not only address some of the concerns that were raised through the committee inquiry but also raise direct feedback I received during my time as the shadow minister for communities, disability services and seniors.

It has been acknowledged that, whilst important, pre-employment screening processes can be a barrier to entry for workers in this sector. Accordingly, concerns were expressed by the Queensland Human Rights Commission regarding the potential barriers that may be encountered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in regional and remote communities. Specifically, the Queensland Human Rights Commission has stated that the proposed dual system, that being both a disability worker screening check and a blue card check, will serve to add further impediments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in this sector and, what is more, have additional negative impacts on already thin markets for disability service providers in rural and remote communities. I note that the committee, in its tabled report, did recognise the concerns as expressed by the Queensland Human Rights Commission and welcomed the advice from the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors that specialised processes for individuals in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as well as remote communities will be developed.

It is incumbent on the recently appointed Labor Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and his department to ensure that such processes are well established and in place prior to commencement. The last thing that we would want to see—and certainly cannot afford to see—is a shortage of NDIS accredited workers, especially in Queensland's remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, where thin market issues are already highly prevalent due to unnecessary barriers.

Another significant concern and barrier that has been raised by stakeholders is the potential cost that will be borne by applicants undergoing worker screening before they commence employment. On page 12 of the parliamentary committee report, the Queenslanders with Disability Network has expressed such concerns stating that there will be a financial barrier created for those who are on income support yet are applying for worker screening approval in order to gain employment as a disability support worker. Consequently, the QDN urged the Palaszczuk state Labor government to keep the cost of screening applications low in order to attract more workers into the disability sector. The Liberal National Party certainly supports these sentiments, especially in view of the current economic environment and associated impacts of the COVID-19 health pandemic, which I note was also raised by the QDN.

In implementing an NDIS worker screening program for Queensland, the Palaszczuk state Labor government must ensure that it is fair, consistent and established with reference to other jurisdictions. This includes individual applicant costs and the associated fee structure. Unfortunately, the Palaszczuk

state Labor government has an abysmal track record when it comes to imposing higher taxes, fees and charges on Queenslanders as well as being less than cognisant of the impacts its decisions can have on vulnerable Queenslanders and the ever-growing cost-of-living pressures they face.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the associated concerns relating to the right to privacy, information sharing and confidentiality of applicants through the NDIS worker screening process. Both the Queensland Law Society and the Queensland Human Rights Commission were quite vocal on this issue, with emphasis on the need to ensure an applicant's privacy is given priority as this screening process is implemented. Given the sheer scope and significance of developing and implementing Queensland's nationally consistent NDIS worker screening system, again it would be appreciated if the minister could respond to such concerns on behalf of the Palaszczuk state Labor government.

Still on the subject of cost, there is another issue that should concern all Queenslanders greatly and one which has been specifically raised by LNP members of the committee in their statement of reservation. It was revealed during the committee inquiry that a new ICT database is currently being built by this government in order to appropriately store private and sensitive information of NDIS worker screening applicants. The Palaszczuk state Labor government and the delivery of ICT projects simply do not mix. More than half a billion dollars has been wasted by Labor on over-budget ICT projects—and some projects ultimately had to be scrapped altogether.

Such is their contempt for the taxpayer's dollars and incompetence in project delivery that the Liberal National Party holds grave concerns that the Palaszczuk state Labor government will simply deliver another ICT project that is not fit for purpose and will be over budget or, worse, has to be abandoned. The Palaszczuk state Labor government cannot afford to not get this right. A rigorous, secure and properly tested ICT database must be delivered by the Palaszczuk state Labor government. As this is also essential in ensuring a nationally consistent approach to NDIS worker screening, our state's finances and reputation depend on it.

In concluding today I say that, as the NDIS continues to roll out across our state and our nation, it continues to completely transform the lives of so many for the better. Recently Australia had the incredible milestone of seeing the 400,000th participant join the NDIS, and 150,000 of those participants are receiving supports for the very first time. As I said at the start of my speech, such significant reform takes time because we simply must get it right. We owe it to the 400,000 people who have already joined and the many thousands more who will continue to join to ensure that they are part of a national disability insurance scheme that can deliver those quality outcomes that are consistent across jurisdictions and that ultimately has the best protections, safeguards and worker screening systems put in place.

I thank all members of the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee of the 56th Parliament for their examination of this legislation, the committee secretariat for the support they provided as well as all organisations and stakeholders who submitted to the inquiry.

Finally, can I say it was a pleasure to serve as the shadow minister for communities and shadow minister for disability services during the 56th Parliament. I met so many wonderful Queenslanders and engaged with many organisations supporting Queenslanders with various disabilities. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their support and for the opportunity to advocate for them, to hold the Palaszczuk state Labor government to account on relevant state government initiatives and funding as well as to participate in the development and implementation of evidence based policy initiatives to support the disability sector at both the state and federal levels of government. I wish my colleague the member for Surfers Paradise all the best given his recent appointment as shadow minister for seniors, communities and disability services.