




Speech By
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DISABILITY SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION (WORKER SCREENING) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (2.16 pm): I support this bill. It is nice to be able to speak to this bill the day after the International Day of People with Disability. How wonderful it was yesterday to have the Sporting Wheelies Association come in to Parliament House and show us some of the fantastic work they do. It was particularly poignant for me because I used to work with a kindred organisation called the Queensland Recreation Association for Sport for people with an intellectual disability. We worked very closely with the Sporting Wheelies.

I have spoken in previous speeches to this House about my thoughts on how people who have a disability can be empowered to live a meaningful and fulfilling life with just a few adjustments and some support. Central to that process is making sure that, whatever services people with a disability are involved in, they are deeply involved in the design of them and are consulted. That has certainly happened in relation to this bill. We need to not do things to people; we need to do things with people and do them together. That is very important.

As I was driving to parliament yesterday, I was really pleased to hear Professor Paul Harper being interviewed on ABC Radio. Professor Harper is a respected human rights lawyer based at UQ.

Ms McMillan: Ex-student of Cavendish Road.

Mr KELLY: I take that interjection. Is the member reading my notes over my shoulder? He is an ex-student of Cavendish Road, a very proud Cavroadian! He is also a Paralympian. It was really interesting to hear him reflecting on International Day of People with Disability. He talked about the need for society to move towards viewing all people in a context of diversity rather than disability. I thought that was a very interesting thought to put out there. Professor Harper has low or no vision and has risen to the top of his profession in law and participated in the Paralympics.

The NDIS is a key part of providing those adjustments and support for people with disabilities to live fulfilling and meaningful lives. Yes, there have been some challenges as that has rolled out but they are certainly working through those challenges. It is really delivering some good outcomes for people. I know there were people right across the political spectrum who joined the Every Australian Counts campaign for that to become a reality.

From an economic perspective, it is a really exciting program. We are moving away from government departments determining what is good for people to allowing people with a disability to make self-determinations about what they need in their life. It is a very interesting movement. There are many economists around the world watching this as it is fairly unique.

Key to the success of the NDIS for many of the services are the workers who support people with disabilities. It is not just intellectual disabilities; it is a whole range of disabilities. Once people are in a care and a caring relationship—a carer/caring relationship—there is the potential for people to unfortunately also suffer from abuse, neglect and sexual abuse. We have seen that time and time again

across a whole range of institutions and situations where there are carers. That is why people like myself who are in the nursing profession and other caring professions—the member for Surfers Paradise would be aware of this from his work in the dental profession—operate under a strict code of ethics to try to achieve the highest standards. However, we do need systems in place to protect people who are potentially vulnerable.

Generally speaking, when someone needs some degree of care, they will have a degree of vulnerability. For years I managed organisations that provided services for people with intellectual disabilities and I saw just how potentially vulnerable people are when we put them into one-on-one situations. Sadly, as the name suggests, we are hearing that quite regularly through testimony being put before the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability which is documenting the harrowing experiences of, sadly, far too many people with a disability in our community. The rates of sexual abuse, physical abuse and mental abuse of people with disabilities of all types far exceeds the rates for people without a disability, so it is quite concerning and quite disturbing.

It is good to see a national approach being taken to the screening of workers. This will prevent the sorts of stories and situations we are hearing revealed at the royal commission. The one that stuck with me the most was the young man with an intellectual disability who obtained a volunteer position. He was very happy. His family noticed a real change in his demeanour, in his confidence and in his ability to socialise. Unfortunately he was sexually abused by one of his co-workers who was in a supervisory position above him and that young man has now spent the last 15 years socially isolated at home. That is a terrible outcome for that individual.

This bill anticipates that the ultimate responsibility for the screening of workers rests with employers, but I can tell members that from my time as a manager of organisations that had staff working with people with intellectual disabilities we need tools to be able to do that. When I cast my mind back to those two decades or more ago when I was involved in this, we just did not have these sorts of tools, and they would have been invaluable in terms of being able to screen staff. This bill provides really invaluable tools for NDIS providers to be able to screen their staff properly.

I am pleased to see that there is a range of both private and not-for-profit organisations moving into the space of providing NDIS services. They are bringing new investment into the area, which is great. We are seeing even more services than would be delivered if we just left it to government. I would hope that those providers, particularly the private sector providers, come in with a good spirit and realise that the way to deliver good services is, firstly, to make sure they screen their workers well and they get people with good intentions and, secondly, to ensure that they invest in the training of those workers and the wages of those workers so that it becomes a sector where we have highly qualified, well-remunerated people. That will also go a long way to stemming the abuse. For now, screening is certainly an extremely important step forward. I support the bill and commend it to the House.