




Speech By
Kim Richards

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

Record of Proceedings, 16 July 2020

**MINISTERIAL AND OTHER OFFICE HOLDER STAFF AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (5.28 pm): I rise to support the Ministerial and Other Office Holder Staff and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. This bill was brought before our Economics and Governance Committee. I thank my fellow committee members for the process that we have undertaken. I also thank the committee secretariat staff. The policy objectives of the bill are for the director-general of the department and the Clerk of the Parliament to have power to conduct criminal history checks to assess the suitability of persons engaged across ministers' offices and including within our electorate offices.

It was interesting to hear the Leader of the Opposition's contribution, and I think there might be a little bit of a short memory around integrity issues. We certainly did not see the LNP introduce measures like this to improve integrity. By stark contrast, they sacked the PCCC in the dark of the night. We also heard the member for Mermaid Beach say it would have been obvious that we should have had these criminal checks in place. Again, I note that this legislation was never introduced during the term of the LNP.

The committee undertook a briefing. We were given guidance that the Queensland Police and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and also the Clerk of the Parliament had been consulted with in terms of preparing this legislation.

This bill further reinforces the checks and balances with regard to ministerial staff and other office holders. These are staff like those in our electorate offices—hardworking staff on all sides of the House—who are strongly engaged with our community members. I would like to thank every EO and our office staff for all of the hard work they do in working with our communities, particularly over the period of this COVID pandemic. I know that there has been a lot of pressure on our staff in terms of engagement within communities and engagement with departments in trying to help resolve our constituents' issues. I give a shout-out to Damien Walker in the department of tourism and state development in leading the Care Army throughout that process. I know that our ministerial staff are tireless in their endeavours to make sure we deliver the best for our Queensland communities.

In terms of looking at criminal history reports, I think it is important to note that this bill does have safeguards and we have been given the appropriate reassurances. The Attorney-General noted the importance of having information safeguards, particularly in the digital age. We need to make sure that we protect sensitive information for our electorate office staff. That is a very important part.

The bill provides that information given to the Police Commissioner by the director-general or the Clerk in making a request for a person's criminal history must not be accessed, disclosed or used for any purpose other than the purpose of assessing that person's suitability and applicability to the role they are applying for. There are strong punishments and penalties in force for breach of that trust in the provision of information.

The bill also amends the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001. These minor amendments look at the notification and availability of forms and make some changes to the way we conduct our business in this place by omitting reference to the *Votes and Proceedings* and inserting '*Record of Proceedings*'.

I note how transformative Queen's Wharf will be for this precinct and the whole top end of William Street. Clause 9 amends the Parliamentary Service Act 1988 with regard to the plan details of the parliamentary precinct. This amendment is necessary due to the resurvey of land. It is important to ensure our plans and drawings are correct.

This is good legislation. As the member for Mermaid Beach said, we should have had these checks and balances in place some time ago. This bill goes a long way to ensuring that the people we have serving the communities of Queensland are best placed to do that. I commend the bill to the House.