




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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DISABILITY SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION (WORKER SCREENING) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (2.23 pm): Today I rise in the House to voice my support for the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill 2020. Like my colleagues before me, I also want to reference the fact that it was great to see the Sporting Wheelies and Paralympians here at Parliament House yesterday for International Day of People with Disability. It is sensational to see the goals of that organisation in seeking to create a more inclusive society, particularly in terms of making it inclusive for those young children.

While I have been very fortunate, as a young child I had callipers for about three or four years at the start of my schooling days, and things have changed. I experienced a bit of heckling in the playground from time to time. Some of my school mates thought it was fun to push me over, because I was not all that stable on my feet, but I have been fortunate enough that the issues that I had as a child have not continued with me through life. Yesterday it was great to hear and share some of the stories of how children with disability are being supported in school and being given the opportunity to participate and that specific sports are being developed that are friendly for them to participate in.

Yesterday we were also chatting about the inclusiveness of the last Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast and in South-East Queensland. Was it not great to go to a sporting event where people with disability were able to participate and compete at the same time and in similar heats as other athletes? It was a great message to the world and a real credit to Queensland that we were able to host an event that was just so inclusive. There were some athletic events at Carrara that I was fortunate enough to go and see with some amazing results. Just to see the support of the crowd for those people with disability participating was incredibly moving and again a great credit to our state and to our region for hosting that event.

At the swimming at the Gold Coast Aquatic Centre one minute you were watching events with athletes participating in their races and then after three or four races there would be a whole squad of people with disability competing. Frankly, it was hard to tell the difference at times. I am not particularly all that well informed or good at remembering the names of sporting heroes and people who participate in these things, but it just seemed to fit so well. I would love to see the Olympics move that way as well, but I am told that that is not the case. Anyway, I digress.

In rising to speak in support of this bill, it is important to highlight just how important it is to have this national approach. As a former assistant minister for child safety, at the time I had the pleasure of working with Tracy Davis and the department of communities and child safety. We visited many disability service providers across the state. At the time we also undertook a lot of work in terms of blue card and yellow card reforms. One of the particular challenges was that almost 10 years ago there was not a lot of information sharing between the states. There were issues of privacy and all sorts of other legislative impediments to being able to source information consistently from around the nation. In a

sense we needed to open the borders, to use a more common analogy, to that information flow so that people could not game the system—that is, you could not have someone who was a known problem in Victoria moving to Queensland and then wanting to seek access to people who were vulnerable.

Fundamentally, the reforms that are proposed in the legislation are all about protecting people with disability so that those people with disability can live free from abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation, and that also includes financial abuse and exploitation. Sadly, there are many occasions where people with disability are taken advantage of. This legislation seeks to ensure that we protect those people from the sorts of people who would seek to take advantage.

From a technical perspective, the legislation will also make amendments to the blue card legislation with regard to working with children risk management and screening. I want to take a moment to applaud all of those people who work here in Queensland within the blue card department and in the children and families commission and also the people within the department of communities who have carriage and responsibility for the yellow card system. I know that this will be an interesting season for them as they massage these changes through, but I know that these changes will be very welcome.

The public servants who work in this space have a very challenging and unique job to do. They have to make some tough calls. It is not as simple or as seamless as people would believe it to be. At one point the applications would be run through the system and they would be sent off to the police for police checks. I believe those systems are more automated these days. I do not know if the figures have changed, but the rejection rate was about one in 10. It could be that someone had a criminal record. Perhaps they had a big night out in Surfers Paradise when they were 17 and urinated in a pot-plant and should not have. All of these exceptions have to be investigated thoroughly. There is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes to make sure that we get to the bottom of the screening process to not only make sure that we are not restricting people unnecessarily but also make sure that we do not let just anyone get a yellow or a blue card.

When we start to think about this in the context of some of the more far flung parts of Queensland, some of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the north and the west of the state, some of those screening processes become even more complex. I note that in the last term of parliament members of Katter's Australian Party raised this issue a number of times. It is still a very complex issue. There are challenges around assessment with kinship carers and family and extended family in those communities. The people who work behind the scenes in our department do a lot of hard work and hopefully these reforms will not only make that task a little easier but also ensure much better outcomes for people suffering with disability.

It is important to highlight that there are many great organisations around the state that provide services to people with disability. I have a particular passion for the organisation called Youngcare which has done incredible work over the last decade to see young people with disability, who were previously left in a nursing home, often with people two, three or four times their age—not an age appropriate environment—given the opportunity to live in an incredibly well supported environment where there is lots of fun and laughter, great support and some really good people around them, such as the magnificent facility at Coomera.

In relation to the opening of the borders, it disappoints me that the legislation does not go further. I think it will come eventually. We need the opportunity to set up better information sharing with New Zealand. We have a significant number of Kiwis living in this country who work in the disability sector, in our child support areas and nursing homes. I am sure that the assessment process around their suitability for yellow and blue cards can be challenging at times and I wonder if at some point that would become a consideration in terms of information sharing not only between the states but also perhaps between Australia and New Zealand.

We have indicated that we will not be opposing this legislation. It is a sensible step forward. It provides national consistency. I believe that the sharing of information between states affords greater protection of those most vulnerable in our society.