




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 16 July 2020

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

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (5.44 pm): I rise to add to the debate on the Ministerial and Other Officer Holder Staff and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. Of course, I sit on the Economics and Governance Committee which looked into this bill. That was long ago, back in early 2018, so it is good to finally see this return before the House. To have a relatively straightforward piece of legislation take over two years to return to the House again shows the government's lack of genuine care for integrity. I would have thought, given the set of circumstances that led to this bill, the government would be in a hurry to change the laws and give the explicit power to the director-general and Clerk rather than rely on what the Premier described in her own words in 2018 as 'interim measures'. It has been a long interim, because currently they are still in place.

It was disappointing to see the Premier and the minister shift the blame for this situation. Members of the government have no ability to admit their error and to properly correct it in a timely way. I support the objective of the bill to provide explicit power to the director-general and to the Clerk of the Parliament to conduct criminal history checks. It is a necessary and commonsense approach to the employment of our staff and to ensure employees adhere to the already high standards in many roles in the Public Service.

Our committee received no submissions to the bill, which I think either demonstrates how clear it was to the public that this change was a necessary, long overdue amendment that is commonplace in many workforces or just shows that clearly not enough people follow the good work of the Economics and Governance Committee. I also support the privacy protections the bill provides, with the unauthorised disclosure of the information in criminal checks punishable with a penalty of up to \$12,615. It delivers strong adherence to high standards for staff while protecting their privacy.

When it comes to the staff in our electorate offices, yes, the Queensland parliament is the technical employer, but we all know the reality of the situation. We have a big say in who works in our offices, ministers even more so. Often, our electorate staff are our representatives in the community, particularly when we are in parliament. They are given access to a wide variety of information and hear some of our most vulnerable constituents' stories. We need to ensure the staff we hire show integrity and honesty to ensure the public can trust our officers in a safe and trustworthy environment.

I have always aimed for my office to be a place my community knows is there for them, whether to hold a community group meeting or event or to come and speak to me. I want the people I represent to know the office is safe to come to, even if they are going through a difficult time. Many tears have been shed in the office as constituents have revealed their difficulties, hurt and grief at whatever is their situation. My staff have shown incredible care and compassion in those situations, and I am thankful to them.

I will take a moment to pay tribute to the Bonney electorate office team: Joe Wilkinson, Katie Omrod and Deb Rowles. They all have been with me since I was elected and do a brilliant job. They have stayed around for so long and are passionate about working in my EO because they are truly

community minded. Deb's second job is administering the Labrador Senior Citizen's Centre. She is a volunteer for the BeachCare program. Katie was the P&C president at Arundel State School and is heavily involved through her church community at Arundel Presbyterian. Joe is president of Hope Island Rotary. He sits on the board of Headway ABI and chairs our local police community consultative committee.

When they started, none of my staff even flinched at having a criminal history check. They took it as a given that they would need one and were willing and ready to pass over whatever information was needed. They saw the need for these checks and to be above reproach to the community. On the other hand, the government has delayed this bill and takes no responsibility for what happened in the former minister for child safety's office. Sadly, we all know this is not the only matter of integrity of this government, with story after story of staff and ministers neither upholding best practices nor taking responsibility for their mistakes when found out. None of us would claim to be perfect, but being willing to stand up and say, 'I got it wrong' is imperative to build the trust of the public.