




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (5.03 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution with respect to the Child Protection Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. Like all members of the House, I am pleased to see this legislation come forward. In particular, I am pleased with the recommendations in respect of the *Working with children checks* report and the recommendations of the royal commission on information sharing amongst the states.

For some time this has been a significant area of concern, particularly for border communities such as the Gold Coast and the Tweed. I know this happens in other states. Given the transient nature of Australians and the way that people can move so easily and quickly around the country, it is important that we have the ability through the Police Service to monitor the issuance of blue cards and the behaviour of perpetrators in respect of children. I know that in child safety circles this has been an issue of concern for many years. It is good to see that through this legislation we are progressing the recommendations of the royal commission for greater information sharing amongst the states.

I note that the legislation looks at issues around adoption. I want to touch on some of the challenges around that issue and the trauma that is still a lived experience for many Australians who endured forced adoption. During a Mental Health Select Committee hearing we heard from one witness who made a public submission. He talked very openly about the trauma that he faced as an adopted child. He ended up in a family that did not work out so well for him. Sadly, as a result of that, he ended up within the child protection system and subsequently endured significant childhood trauma, including physical and sexual abuse. It is so important that we look more broadly at these issues and challenges that are facing us as a government and as a society.

I note that the explanatory notes and the legislation itself deal with issues around domestic violence. The Queensland Police Service and other services need to access detailed information about perpetrators of domestic violence to determine the potential risk of those people accessing a blue card and being allowed to work with children in other states. Our children are a precious resource and we need to protect them. In respect of the blue card system, any improvements we can make are certainly valued.

I long for the day when the blue card will be even more accessible and more transparent in terms of the information that it can provide to community organisations. Perhaps one day we will see an online portal where a club secretary, an employee or someone working within an organisation that deals directly with children can verify a person's blue card and make sure that there has not been a cancellation within a two-year period or access other relevant information. I believe that with the greater use of technology there is also the potential to better track people who have found a way around the system and are, sadly, moving from one club, organisation or sporting group to another. Any strides in terms of improving our blue card system are incredibly important.

As I have spoken on many occasions about my involvement with Bravehearts, it would be remiss of me not to raise it in the context of child protection. This is my 15th year as a director of the organisation. This year we celebrate our 25th anniversary and a special event will be held at the

Brisbane City Hall on 28 May. It is exciting to see the work of that organisation, albeit sad that organisations such as Bravehearts, the Morcombe Foundation and other organisations that specialise in these areas need to exist. In Australia the reality is that a female child has a one-in-three chance of experiencing sexual assault and abuse before they reach the end of their teens and, likewise, boys have a one-in-three chance.

We need to stand up. We need to do better. We need to become a much stronger voice for our kids. Government and opposition members in this House need to continue to advocate and stand up for the protection and the rights of our children. We must advocate for frontline workers: the child safety officers, the doctors and nurses, the police, the ambulance drivers and the domestic violence support workers. We need to advocate for them so that they are better equipped and have better information to do their job in protecting our most vulnerable.

Over the course of the Mental Health Select Committee hearings—I know that I am possibly jumping the gun a little bit, but it is not legislation being discussed; it is a report that is still to come to the House—a number of organisations raised real concerns about the impact of childhood trauma on people, many of whom carry those scars and that damage through their lives. On many occasions I have spoken to young people who have come through the child protection system, who have been in foster care or whom I have met through great organisations like Create—it plays a very significant advocacy role for young people in our nation—and heard stories where some young people never recover. That is why it is so important for us to protect our most vulnerable.

There is always hope. Thankfully, some young children, because of good counselling and good support—perhaps on some occasions they are lucky enough to end up in a home that truly cares for them and that provides balance, encouragement and love—come through our child protection system and do incredibly well. I often say to young people: in life you have an opportunity to live as a victim or a victor. There are many young people who, because of good support, develop the ability to brush off the terrible experiences of childhood trauma and go on to live very full and productive lives but, sadly, there are many others who just do not have that ability. As Queenslanders, as a government and as members of this House, we need to do better. We need to continue to advocate for our children.

I will close with one of the recommendations made to us by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth and Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership. It states—

Adverse childhood experiences are highly disruptive to healthy brain development and are a specific risk factor for mental illness including suicide. This can in part be addressed at a government level through intersectional collaboration among other policy improvements. For example, TQKP is currently advancing proposals for a Thriving Qld Kids Brain Builders Program.

There are many great things happening in our communities. I commend this bill to the House.