




Speech By  
**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR HILL**

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### **WORKING WITH CHILDREN (INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (6.40 pm): I fully support the Working with Children (Indigenous Communities) Amendment Bill, otherwise known as the blue card bill, which has been introduced three times by the member for Traeger. I find it incredibly disingenuous for our government to promote Voice and treaty while at the same time voting against real solutions that would have a life-changing positive impact on Indigenous communities. What is confusing is that the member for Toohey and chair of the committee, in his own foreword to the committee report, even agreed that a negative blue card notice issued for minor or nonviolent convictions separated families and impeded kinship care in remote communities. The member went on to say—

Our inquiries revealed manifest disadvantage, including that negative notices impact not only individual families but the wider community by disconnecting young people from family, country, language and culture. This disconnect is a modern day injustice, with a haunting reminder of other times in our history when First Nations people were separated from family and country against their wishes. We have to do better.

However, as the chair of the committee, he then recommended the bill not be passed. If he showed these words to the people living in Indigenous communities that are very passionate about this blue card issue, they would say, 'Surely the government would vote for and pass this bill.'

This is the third time this bill has been tabled in more than a decade, and I commend the member for Traeger for his passion to help First Nations people. The member for Traeger raised this more than 10 years ago with the Newman government. He was very passionate about the need to resolve the issues—we heard about them in the committee report—of crime, suicide and family breakup. The sad part about it is that ministers and government constantly rejected it, so he introduced his own private members' bills. He has now introduced three private members' bills.

The government and the opposition have the opportunity to move amendments to a private member's bill, as has happened in the past. The KAP has introduced bills to which both the government and the opposition have moved amendments and that amended bill has been passed through the parliament. We continually hear in this House, 'It has merit. We understand, but we are not going to support it.' Why has this taken 10 years? Will we be here in another 10 years and hear the same spiel that has been given here tonight?

The current blue card system contains significant limitations in the way it applies to the unique circumstances of Indigenous communities. This is resulting in missed opportunities for social and economic development. Employers are insisting that people have a blue card, even if the job does not involve working with children. This is all a starting point in addressing youth crime, by giving parents better access to employment opportunities. For all of us, including Indigenous people in communities, a job gives us a sense of pride and the ability to better care for our families; however, the opposite happens if this is taken away. It leaves people ashamed, and they can easily slide into drugs and alcohol abuse, which is a real issue in these communities, leading to a breakdown in family structure. That is what the committee heard time and time again.

It is very clear that this bill is not advocating for any relaxation to the rules surrounding sexual predators or serious crime. Instead, the bill creates a framework which strengthens the process by enabling the community justice groups to consult with the police and the relevant authorities on whether an individual should be issued with a blue card. This is in the bill right now. The decision would not be made by Brisbane bureaucrats, who would not have a clue what is going on outside Brisbane. This will be a better system, as a person who secures a job with children in the community may not have a record but may be known to the community as a person not to be trusted. It would be far more beneficial for a community to help make the decisions, rather than a person sitting in power a thousand kilometres away.

I want to finish with words from the mayor of Palm Island, Mislam Sam, and the mayor of Yarrabah, Ross Andrews, which perfectly describe why this bill should be passed. These are not the words of the members for Hill, Hinchinbrook or Traeger; they are the words of the mayors of Palm Island and Yarrabah. Palm Island mayor Mislam Sam said that the bill has his support. Those opposite are all saying that it does not have support, but the mayor of Palm Island said that it does have his support. He estimated that there were between 50 and 100 people on the island currently jobless, directly due to being unable to secure a blue card. This has been going on for 10 years, since the member for Traeger introduced the first bill because he could see this was a problem. The mayor also stated—

There is 80 per cent unemployment, but there are a lot of jobs there. No-one can fill these roles. The Police Service has been looking for PLOs for the last two years—\$65,000 a year, four positions, cannot fill them. The education department is crying out for local staff as teacher aides. They cannot fill them. Selectability is crying out for local staff. They cannot fill those positions because they cannot find people with a blue card or yellow card—simple little things.

Yarrabah mayor Ross Andrews said that blue cards posed a significant barrier to employment in his communities. He said—

Blue cards play a part in that as well in terms of getting our people off welfare and engaging in the real economy. There are challenges within the rules of government and how they play out, but there are also opportunities for our people to move forward on many other challenges.

The government is so committed to talking about reconciliation or treaty or the Voice, but when it comes to taking real action it shows a complete lack of wanting to actually fix issues faced by First Nations people. If it did, it would have this fixed right now. Those living in Indigenous communities who overwhelmingly support this bill will find out shortly whether the government is serious or again just paying lip-service to our First Nations people. This bill is about improving quality of life and providing opportunities for Indigenous communities. I ask everyone to support this bill. I commend the bill to the House.