




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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CHILD SAFE ORGANISATIONS BILL; WORKING WITH CHILDREN (RISK MANAGEMENT AND SCREENING) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (2.41 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Child Safe Organisations Bill being debated in cognate with the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. These are important reforms, but if the Labor government really cared about our children then they would have allowed a full and frank debate on them, not the truncated cut-down debate that we are having in the parliament today. The only way to change Labor's chaos and crisis with the management of the parliament and the debate on these really important issues is to change the government on 26 October and show Labor the door in '24.

Children are our state's future but children cannot advocate for themselves. They rely on adults to provide them with protection from harm and abuse. It is disappointing that it has taken quite some time for this legislation to make it into the parliament. In fact, earlier I heard our shadow minister, the member for Whitsunday, say that some of this legislation has taken seven years to make it into the parliament as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse presented its final report in December 2017.

This bill is of particular interest to local government. Currently, over 30 per cent of Queensland councils provide childcare services for their local communities in the absence of the private sector. There is a market failure in many places in rural and regional Queensland. Rural and regional families struggle to access child care and the shortage of qualified childcare workers is a constant issue in the regions. In fact, recently the Regional Australia Institute did a study, funded by Origin Energy, that looked at the Western Downs Regional Council and Maranoa Regional Council areas. They described that regional area as a 'childcare desert' because of the extreme shortage of child care and the extreme shortage of childcare workers.

I note that, in their submission to this legislation, the Local Government Association of Queensland outlined a number of concerns following feedback from council officers in relation to the 10 child safety standards. That feedback related to training logistics, particularly in remote, rural and regional areas; challenges in delivering that training; cultural considerations; the cost implications for councils; and the retention of staff. I have no doubt that councils providing childcare services are well aware of recent media reports and the need to ensure that children are well protected in the centres that they operate. I hope that the Queensland Family and Child Commission will consult with all Queensland councils that operate childcare facilities, including those in rural and remote areas and in our First Nations communities, to identify and provide any additional supports that they may require to implement these key changes. These key changes are very important in caring for our children. I am sure that for those organisations there is a pathway with the child safe standards that are outlined in the bill. However, it will take good management and resources to achieve the outcomes and to ensure that we always strive to protect our children.

I turn to the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, which seeks to implement recommendations from the blue card reviews and the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce. The bill seeks to make changes on how the blue card system works. I declare that I am a blue card holder. The Queensland Family and Child Commission's kinship care report found that blue card screening is not designed for kinship care and that the process creates additional barriers, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers. This issue is raised regularly, particularly by leaders in the Indigenous communities and our Indigenous councils. I am sure that they will continue to monitor the changes as this is an issue that they have consistently raised and have long held concerns about.

The bill removes exemptions for lawyers so that they have to hold a blue card on the basis that it brings the working with children legislation into line with other jurisdictions. Of interest to many in the community will be the changes to commercial services that impact who will now be required to get a blue card. That refers to places such as gyms and play facilities, which are captured under the existing sport and active recreation category. A new standalone category will capture entertainment and party services, beauty or talent competitions and photography services. The bill will remove the exemption for amusement parks so that those employed or engaged in providing services directed at children at an amusement park will be required to hold a blue card. There will not be a requirement to hold a blue card where employees are merely providing food and beverages or equipment and have no contact with children. However, that assumes that there are very distinct lines there. Often volunteer groups provide the amusement as well as cook the barbecue. We will be closely monitoring how that is rolled out.

A lot of people have come to my office to tell me about delays when applying for blue cards. When these changes come in, commercial services and their employees will have to work their way through the blue card system. When I applied for a blue card the interface was not easy to navigate. That process could be simplified, particularly around the IT section, when following the pathway to input all the information required. I do not want to see additional delays for people going through the process. I hope that the system is well resourced so that those who need to obtain a blue card due to the changes in the legislation can do so in a quick manner and can continue providing commercial services.

I will continue to monitor this legislation as it goes through. It is certainly much needed legislation because we have an obligation to do the best we can to care for and protect our children.