




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (2.24 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. This bill was referred to the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee for review. The committee made two recommendations—that the bill be passed and that the provisions requiring adult household members of kinship carers to hold a blue card be removed. Working with children checks are crucial for fostering a protective environment for our children. They are just one of the many practices designed to ensure that the right individuals are entrusted to work with children. After reviewing the working with children check processes, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse echoed the sentiment shared by the majority of stakeholders, both government and non-government, that these checks are invaluable in safeguarding children.

The reforms in this bill align with the Queensland Family and Child Commission's, the QFCC, report about keeping Queensland's children more than safe—the review of the blue card system—which builds upon the earlier works done by the royal commission. The bill seeks to implement, either fully or partially, 12 of the recommendations made in the blue card review report. The QFCC highlighted that Queensland's blue card system is one of the strongest and most established in Australia, yet there is room for improvements to address emerging risks that align with modern expectations. This was also reflected in the recommendations from the former Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce and the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee, especially regarding the need for greater participation in the blue card system for First Nations people.

Caring for family and fostering family connections is not considered employment. It is evident that the blue card system creates blocks for kinship care and presents barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families seeking to care for children within their community. The QFCC emphasised that these barriers conflicted with the Child Protection Act 1999, particularly regarding self-determination, the recognition of cultural child-rearing practices and prioritising the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with their family and community.

While the committee acknowledges that the bill makes meaningful progress in removing obstacles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers by eliminating the blue card requirement for kinship carers themselves, it raised concerns about the ongoing requirement for adult household members to obtain a blue card. Specifically, the committee is concerned that this requirement shifts the unintended consequences of the blue card system from kinship carers to adult members of their households. Stakeholders have expressed concerns that requiring adult household members to obtain a blue card could undermine the intent of the bill. In some cases, potential kinship carers might face the difficult choice of either separating their household to care for the children or forgoing the kinship care. The committee notes that the department has commenced a consultation

process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders during the development of the second stage of reforms to create a framework that is culturally safe and meets the unique needs of these families in kinship care. I commend the bill to the House.