




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (2.28 pm): I rise today to speak on the Child Safe Organisations Bill 2024 and the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. The Child Safe Organisations Bill is a step towards addressing the wellbeing and safety of children in Queensland. It reflects the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and makes the national child safe standards a mandatory requirement across all relevant organisations in Queensland. The bill's key components are the establishment of mandatory compliance with the 10 child safe standards and a universal principle for the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These standards are critical for safeguarding our children and ensuring they are supported in an appropriate way. The bill also introduces a reportable conduct scheme that provides oversight of reporting and investigations into allegations of child abuse by organisations.

While my colleagues and I support the bill, it is important to note that the bill took too long, as most things do with this tired, old Labor government. The recommendations from the royal commission were published back in 2017 and it has taken the government far too long to respond. In the time the government has been failing to respond to those reports, we have seen more harm come to children due to a lack of proper oversight on organisations entrusted with their care. I do not doubt that many organisations have already taken steps to implement child safe standards on their own, but this legislation is important in ensuring consistency and accountability across all relevant sectors.

The Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill also seeks to implement key recommendations from significant reviews, including the QFCC blue card review report. This bill introduces a new decision-making framework for blue card applications, simplifies the disqualification framework and provides the chief executive with greater discretion to suspend cards when necessary. The bill also expands regulated employment categories, adjusts exemptions and introduces provisions for interstate or international emergency workers.

We must also recognise that the government has dragged its feet on the Child Safe Organisations Bill. In 2021 there was a brief period of targeted consultation on these issues, but then, once again, nothing happened. Only once the child protection failures of this government went public did they move forward with this bill. This reactive approach cannot continue. Child safety should not be something that only gets attention when it becomes a headline. The safety of children must always be a priority.

The implementation of child safe standards will commence on 1 October 2025 for some sectors, with all in-scope organisations adhering to these obligations by April 2026. Similarly, the reportable conduct scheme will be rolled out between 2026 and 2027. The phased approach will allow organisations time to adapt, but the government must ensure that this timeline is not extended

unnecessarily. The Queensland Family and Child Commission will oversee the implementation of these standards and the reportable conduct scheme. It is pleasing to see that they are being allocated the necessary budget to ensure they can carry out their expanded role.

Most stakeholders expressed their support for the bill, but it should be noted that some mentioned there were concerns about resourcing and duplication of reporting. Queensland Catholic Education Commission and Independent Schools Queensland raised concerns about the impact on their resources given the additional administrative burden of compliance with both the child safe standards and the reportable conduct scheme. Smaller organisations, many in rural and remote parts of Queensland, share their concerns about their ability to meet some of these requirements given the ongoing staffing and resourcing challenges that many already face.

In May 2004, a little over 20 years ago, a grandmother walked into my office to report the abuse of 11 young children at a local gymnastics club. I was a councillor with Gold Coast city council at the time, and I must admit I was at a bit of a loss as to how best to deal with that complaint. When I went back to council and raised it with officers in the council and my own PA at the time, I was surprised that there was actually no process in place. There were no standards or requirements around reporting. There was a lot of head scratching and a lot of people asking, 'Well, what should we do?' Fortunately, my PA at that time had the sense to call Hetty Johnston. Hetty came the next day. She walked us through some of the issues. She agreed to meet with the families of these abused children. Bravehearts took up the issues on behalf of those families and advocated for them. As a result of that, in September 2004 I attended my first board meeting with Bravehearts as a newly appointed director. That is 20 years ago this month.

I want to pay tribute to many people within child safety organisations in this state who have been advocating for these issues for decades. I acknowledge the work of Hetty Johnston. I especially want to shout out to Carol Ronken, who has been the principal research officer and adviser on many government panels at a state and federal level on behalf of Bravehearts. I also give a shout-out to Deirdre Thompson, the director of counselling and therapeutic services at Bravehearts, who has worked tirelessly on many of these issues for decades as well. There are so many others to name. It would be remiss of me not to mention the advocacy of the Morcombes and of ACT for Kids here in Queensland, who I was introduced to nearly 30 years ago as general manager of Sea FM when they came to us and talked about trying to establish a centre on the Gold Coast. I also want to shout out to Jo Compagne, who has been with Bravehearts for as long as I can remember. I think she has just celebrated more than 20 years with the organisation. I particularly want to thank Alison Geale, our new CEO, and acknowledge her work and advocacy in recent years. I also acknowledge our chair, Vanessa Garrard, who has provided outstanding leadership to that board and that organisation in more recent years.

These bills demonstrate that child safety is an ongoing responsibility that requires all of us to pay attention. It requires a government to take meaningful action without delay, and that is why the LNP will not oppose these bills. Like everyone else in this House, we understand that these changes represent significant improvements to the current child protection system. While we support them, it is critical that we continue to move forward with them and that we continue to advocate for the best interests of children in Queensland. The only way to change the chaos and crisis that we have seen in child safety in recent years is to change the government on 26 October and show Labor the door in '24.