

Question on Notice

No. 219

Asked on 11 March 2021

MRS L GERBER ASKED THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE, MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND MINISTER FOR THE PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (HON S FENTIMAN) –

QUESTION:

With reference to the report ‘Keeping Queensland's children more than safe: Review of the blue card system’—

Will the Attorney-General advise which of the 81 recommendations have (a) been completed, (b) are in progress and (c) are yet to be commenced and (d) for each instance in (c) what is the reason for the delay in commencing?

ANSWER:

The Queensland Family and Child Commission review found that Queensland's blue card system is one of the strongest in Australia.

Blue cards are one of a range of measures in place across government to protect children. The blue card system mitigates past, present and future risks to children through:

- screening people working with children and deeming people ineligible to work with children where, based on their known police or disciplinary information, they pose a risk of harm;
- monitoring all Blue Card holders and applicants on a daily basis through an electronic interface with the Queensland Police Service (QPS) for changes in their Queensland police information; and
- legislatively requiring child-related organisations to implement policies and procedures to manage risks to children.

The Palaszczuk Government takes the safety of Queensland's children extremely seriously. That is why last year the Government implemented its election commitment to introduce a ‘No Card, No Start’ scheme. As part of that implementation, the Palaszczuk Government injected \$17 million over three years to modernise the blue card system.

No Card, No Start brings paid employees into line with volunteers and business operators and prevents someone from employing a person in child-related employment unless the person holds a working with children clearance and the employer has notified the chief executive about the employment or proposed employment of the person. A person who starts or continues in regulated employment without a blue card could face a five year jail term, in certain circumstances.

In 2019, the Palaszczuk Government also implemented recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the QFCC to include more offences, such as bestiality, kidnapping of a child, kidnapping for ransom of a child, child stealing and abduction of a child under 16, as disqualifying offences under the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000*.

As at 7 April 2021 there are 832,958 current blue card holders and 12,009 applications in progress. This means that 844,967 card holders and applicants have their Queensland police information monitored on a daily basis. Since 1 July 2020, 200,911 applications (blue/exemption cards) were lodged with BCS (as at 27 February 2021).

The blue card system is a high-volume environment with significant community engagement. Changes to the system need to be implemented carefully to ensure that current safeguards to children are not lessened.

Consequently, recommendations are being implemented in phases, in close consultation with stakeholders. An implementation reference group has been in place since 2018 to oversee the implementation of the recommendations. The group is made up of key government agencies and non-government organisations that engage with the blue card system across Queensland.

Work has progressed on 70 out of 81 recommendations. Of these, 13 recommendations are completed in full (recommendations 19, 20, 22, 26, 28, 50, 63, 65, 69, 72, 78-80) and 57 recommendations are in progress.

Significantly, the completed recommendations include:

- as noted above, the introduction of the 'No Card, No Start' laws which ensure that all people working with children undergo blue card screening before they can commence work;
- a modernised application process allowing people to apply for and renew their blue cards online with reduced processing timeframes for most people;
- an improved identity check process for people applying for blue cards and new cards issued now featuring a photograph of the cardholder;
- an online portal for organisations to electronically manage their blue card obligations and obtain real-time blue card status for their linked employees and volunteers; and
- stricter requirements for people who rely on an exemption to work or volunteer with children, such as a volunteer parent, through the introduction of new prohibitions and associated offences for restricted persons (which includes, for example, negative notice holders and disqualified persons).

Work on 11 recommendations (recommendations 21, 23, 38, 47, 57, 59, 60, 67, 70, 76, 77) are yet to commence. Two of these relate to a statutory review process and therefore cannot be commenced until all reforms to the blue card system are finalised. The others have not yet commenced because they are dependent on the implementation of other recommendations and/or other government initiatives at the national and state level.