




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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**WORKING WITH CHILDREN (RISK MANAGEMENT AND SCREENING) AND
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (3.51 pm): As the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for communities, disability services and seniors and shadow minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships, I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. I have previously spoken in this place on the absolute importance of protecting Queensland's youngest and our most vulnerable from a range of physical, sexual and psychological harms. Recently when addressing the National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Bill 2018 I said that any abuse, especially the sexual abuse of a child, is an unthinkable, horrific crime. It is a crime perpetrated on the most vulnerable in our society at a time when they must rely on the trust and support of those around them to help guide and nurture them through life. It is quite simply a fundamental breach of trust.

In Queensland, a key pillar of the state sanctioned system of trust, a safety net afforded to parents and carers of children—indeed, providing some semblance with respect to peace of mind—is our blue card system. Sadly and tragically, in more recent times we have had cases and examples where our blue card system has not been as strong as it could and should be here in Queensland.

Let me be clear: the blue card system is not infallible, but it is surely incumbent upon all of us in this House as legislator to ensure that our blue card system is as strong and robust as it can be and that we make sure that it keeps up with community expectations. To deliver an enhanced blue card system and meet the community's expectations, significant and important changes are required.

This is not a new revelation. In fact, it has been well known for a significant amount of time and yet it is only now, in the middle of May 2019, that these changes have finally been put before the Queensland parliament. Quite simply, the process by which the Palaszczuk Labor government has sought to implement these changes is nothing short of an absolutely indictment.

As we know, following the tragic death of Tiahleigh Palmer, an innocent child in foster care, a comprehensive review of both the blue card and foster care systems was carried out by the Queensland Family and Child Commission, following a request made by the director-general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet on behalf of the Premier. This comprehensive review was spearheaded by principal commissioner Cheryl Vardon. I take this opportunity to thank Commissioner Vardon and her expert panel and review team for their thorough, professional review and contribution to ensuring a strengthened blue card system here in Queensland.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission review noted that Queensland's blue card system has always been one of the strongest in the country. In fact, we can be proud that the overall strength of our system has been viewed favourably by other jurisdictions around the world—so much so that Queensland's blue card system has served as the model by which other jurisdictions have sought to build and strengthen their own worker screening processes.

Nevertheless, and as the Queensland Family and Child Commission found, while our blue card system has served as a strong foundation for creating safe environments for children, there is scope to make it stronger and more efficient. In its review of the blue card system report, which was handed to the Labor government in 2017, the Queensland Family and Child Commission ultimately made some 81 recommendations in order to introduce significant changes to the blue card system. On these recommendations, the Queensland Family and Child Commission said—

The recommendations are intended to strengthen and streamline the blue card system. They will also build capacity of and support for organisations and people involved in it. Ultimately Queensland's children will be safer doing activities that help them grow, learn and develop.

That was in July 2017. We are almost two years to the day since these important and vital recommendations were handed down and yet it is only now that they are here before the Queensland parliament.

A senior Liberal National Party official in the western suburbs Paul McMonagle says—

The lazy Socialist Palaszczuk Labor Government should always be condemned for its delayed and inadequate legislative agenda as well as its lack of adequate resourcing in child safety and failed infrastructure spending, particularly in the western suburbs of Brisbane.

Why the significant delay on this legislation? Let us not forget that it was in fact this Labor government's own election commitment in 2017 to introduce the no-card no-start policy so that no person can start paid employment without an appropriately approved blue card. This is another key policy, another key election commitment that the Palaszczuk Labor government made to the people of Queensland, which they only then put on the backburner.

Sadly, when this Labor government finally decided to do something about strengthening our blue card system some six weeks ago we saw the embarrassing scenes here in the Queensland parliament where the Labor government chose to instead delay this important debate. Why was that? It was because we on this side of the House—the members of the Liberal National Party—made it clear that we intended to bring forth a number of sensible and critical amendments to make sure that the Labor government got changes to the blue card laws right and that they were in the interests of the public of Queensland. We owed that to Queenslanders, especially our youngest and most vulnerable Queenslanders. We owed it to them to make sure that we held this lazy Palaszczuk Labor government to account and to ensure that the changes made to our blue card laws were as robust and efficient as possible.

That is why we flagged our intent to introduce amendments that would strengthen the blue card system where the Palaszczuk Labor government would not by: firstly, expanding the range of disqualifying offences and preventing offenders convicted of disqualifying offences from ever obtaining a blue card; secondly, removing the eligibility declaration to prevent all disqualified persons from ever being eligible to apply for and hold a blue card, in line with the Queensland Family and Child Commission's recommendations; thirdly, preventing offenders charged or convicted with a serious offence from working with children; and, fourthly, compelling applicants to disclose international criminal histories, in line with recommendations of the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

With reference to the legislation that is finally before the Queensland parliament now and with reference to the contribution made by my colleague the Liberal National Party shadow Attorney-General, the member for Toowoomba South, David Janetzki MP, the Liberal National Party supports the bill, but we will be moving a number of amendments to strengthen the legislation. I note that the policy objectives of the bill are to: firstly, give effect to the government's election commitment to amend the Working With Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 and introduce an automated blue card application process to prevent people commencing paid work while a blue card application is pending—the no-card no-start election commitment; and, secondly, implement recommendations from the Queensland Family and Child Commission's report *Keeping Queensland children more than safe: review of the blue card system* and *Recommendation 28 supplementary review: a report on information sharing to enhance the safety of children in regulated home-based services*.

As the Liberal National Party's shadow Attorney-General perfectly articulated, the Liberal National Party in Queensland has a strong and proud history, particularly over the last 10 years, of supporting whilst in opposition and delivering when in government positive reforms that have always sought to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of Queensland's most vulnerable. Our consistent advocacy for a stronger blue card system, our support of this bill and the government's amendments only build on that history.

After an inexcusably long delay, I am pleased that we are finally seeing such important reforms to our blue card system. Yet the Labor government's bill and its delayed amendments are far short and still do not meet the expectation of all Queenslanders.

As Queensland contends with more Labor failures and crises—the unbelievable and outrageous crisis in our youth detention system, a child safety system that has been in crisis and a health minister more concerned with renaming the Lady Cilento hospital than delivering for the young patients contained within—Queenslanders have rightly lost faith that this Labor government can deliver for our youngest and most vulnerable. The Labor government and its Premier are taking no responsibility for the human rights crisis in our watch houses. Today in question time and also following question time we have seen ministers not take one skerrick of accountability or responsibility for that disaster that is looming in our watch houses.

Queenslanders have seen this all before. Queenslanders remember former Labor premier Peter Beattie calling a snap election in 2004 following the failure of his then minister Anna Bligh and the Queensland department of families with respect to serious abuse of children in foster care. What does Labor always do? They promote a failed minister to become premier, as they did with Anna Bligh and now with Annastacia Palaszczuk. Queenslanders have also seen Labor's failure in health under Beattie and former health minister Wendy Edmond and now under the current Minister for Health as well.

In returning to the long title of the bill—

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Moggill has the call. There is far too much chatter in the chamber. Just before you finish, member for Moggill, 'lazy government' has been termed unparliamentary before. I ask you to withdraw.

Dr ROWAN: I withdraw that term. It is only the Liberal National Party that will always put the interests of Queensland children first and foremost. We will always deliver for safe communities. Whilst this bill is positive, there are certainly more amendments needed and it could go further than it does. The Liberal National Party will always stand up for our most vulnerable here in Queensland.