




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.22 pm): I rise to speak to the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and, more importantly, to speak in support of the amendments to be moved by my colleague the member for Toowoomba South. Protecting children from the vile creatures who mean them harm must be a priority for any government. As a parliament we must make no apology for ensuring the laws in Queensland that protect our future generations are the strongest possible. While I welcome the government's efforts at protecting children, we simply must do more.

While I will not be opposing the bill, I implore all members to properly consider the amendments foreshadowed by the LNP, because their sole intent is to strengthen protections for our children. All of us in this place have heard stories of our most vulnerable being left even more exposed and vulnerable due to the failings of the current blue card system. If protecting children with the strongest possible blue card system is not a priority and a reason to put constituents ahead of political allegiances, I do not know what is.

This government took the no-card no-start policy to the last election, but here we are, over a year later, still waiting for that policy to be enacted. One can only question why it took so long. It is a fact that in the last financial year alone 21 disqualified offenders started working with children. In the past three financial years, 66 disqualified people have had access to children. That is 66 offenders too many working with Queensland children. We must act to prevent this number being added to. I would encourage the Attorney-General to ensure these provisions are enacted as soon as possible, not at some stage in the future. While we must ensure that the people working with our children are thoroughly checked, we must also ensure that we are not left with reduced services due to delays.

While this bill adds to the list of disqualifying offences, it does not go far enough. Of course murder or the rape of an adult should disqualify someone from working with children. Of course kidnapping, abduction and child stealing should disqualify an applicant. Surely a bestiality conviction should prevent someone from working with children. So, too, should manslaughter, choking, suffocation or strangulation in a domestic setting, torture, kidnapping, child stealing, cruelty to children under 16, incest and trafficking in children.

As I mentioned earlier, I will not be opposing this bill, but the reality is that the LNP amendments are not only needed but also essential. It is the LNP amendments to the bill that will expand the range of disqualifying offences and prevent convicted offenders from ever obtaining or even applying for a blue card. It is the LNP amendments that will ensure applicants who have committed heinous crimes overseas never work with Queensland children.

The fact is that any member of this House who does not support the LNP amendments simply does not want the strongest protections for the next generation. Any member who is contemplating voting against these amendments must search their conscience and ask why they put party politics ahead of Queensland's children. Any member who votes against these amendments must do so knowing that their constituents will hold them accountable.

People who work with children in Queensland play a key role in guiding future generations. We must ensure not only that our children are safe but also that they have the best role models possible. As a society we accept that those who have committed offences involving drugs or violence will face consequences such as licence suspension. If we accept that these people cannot operate a vehicle until their charges are heard and dismissed, why do we allow them to work with children?

We must acknowledge that the current system is not working. We must acknowledge that Queensland families and Queensland children deserve better protection. Let us once and for all stop violent child killers from even having the right to apply to work with children. Let us close those loopholes once and for all. The amendments proposed by my colleague the member for Toowoomba South are practical and reflect current community concerns: amendments including the removal of the current eligibility declaration process, in accordance with the blue card review report, meaning that there will be no avenues for a disqualified person to apply for or receive a blue card—as it should be; amendments such as noting that the chief executive is not required to decide a person’s application while a charge for a serious offence is pending against the person or if the person has been convicted of a serious offence—as it should be; and an amendment to the Youth Justice Act to ensure that a child is not held in custody at a police station, establishment or watch house for more than 72 hours after the child’s arrest—as it should be.

I make no apology for wanting the strongest possible protections for Queensland children. I implore all members to support the LNP amendments. Put politics aside and make the strongest possible statement to those who mean harm to Queensland children—that we as a parliament will put our future generations first. I support this legislation, but make no mistake: any member who opposes the amendments foreshadowed by my colleague has let down Queensland children.