



Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 (Government Bill)

A submission to the:
The Education, Employment and Small Business Committee (EESBC)

Prepared by:
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Authorised by:
John Dalgleish, Head of Strategy and Research, **yourtown**



Dear Committee,

We are delighted to have the opportunity to provide our feedback on the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 (Government Bill). The current system is in need of some critical changes to ensure the timely and appropriate review of the background and history checks of people working with children and we are encouraged by the Government's commitment to reform.

yourtown is a national organisation and registered charity that aims to tackle the issues affecting the lives of young people. Established in 1961, our mission is to enable young people, especially those who are marginalised and seldom heard, to improve their quality of life. To this end, **yourtown** provides a range of face-face and virtual services to young people and families seeking support. These services include Kids Helpline, social enterprises, employment and educational programs, accommodation responses to young parents experiencing homelessness and women and children seeking refuge from domestic and family violence, young parent programs and Parentline.

yourtown strongly supports the Bill's stated objective of preventing people from commencing work with children while a blue card application is pending ('No Card, No Start'). This reform is required to ensure that people who pose a risk to children cannot exploit the system to temporarily work with them. However, currently the average processing time of a bluecard for a new applicant due to start work is 6 weeks. We would therefore ask that Government takes action to develop and fund a system that reduces this extended processing time so that new employees can commence work without such a delay. Our employees are vital to the operation of our services, and delays in their commencement detrimentally impact the delivery and quality of critical supports to the vulnerable children and young people with whom we work.

We also keenly welcome the development and introduction of an online organisational portal to enable organisations to more efficiently and effectively manage blue card obligations. However, we would urge the Government to further develop and use the online portal to enable greater efficiencies and effectiveness through its introduction. For example, we recommend that Queensland adopt a system similar to the online working with children checks system of New South Wales (NSW). The NSW system enables registered employers and parents to easily verify the status of future and current employees/tutors they employ online, and without the need to link employees to organisations. In adopting a similar approach to NSW, Queensland could also reduce the long application processing times.

We support many of the additional safeguards being introduced by the Bill including expanding the range of disqualifying offences under the WWC Act to include bestiality and abduction/kidnapping and the murder and rape of an adult. However, we would like to see additional offences involving the harm of both children and adults be added to the list of disqualifying offences (for example, other physical and sexual abuse and domestic and family violence convictions).

In addition, we recommend that the online portal has a feature to enable organisations to record any relevant disciplinary notices and complaints about employees. This information would not be publically accessible but instead would be held confidentially to enable the chief executive to monitor, identify and act on any trends of worrying behaviour of an individual.

We would also ask that Government further broadens the sectors covered by working with children checks, to include for example, those people working in children's entertainment and delivering children's parties.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to renew our call for the national harmonisation of the working with children checks system as, without harmonisation, significant safety loopholes remain that states cannot effectively manage.

If the Committee should require further information or clarification about any of the issues we have raised in our submission, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

John Dalglish
Head of Strategy and Research