

Media Release

The Hon Martin Pakula MP
Attorney-General
Minister for Racing



Tuesday, 25 October, 2016

NEW LAWS TO BETTER PROTECT VICTORIAN CHILDREN

The Andrews Labor Government today introduced new laws to better protect Victorian children by strengthening Working with Children Checks.

The *Working with Children Amendment Bill 2016* will make the application process more rigorous, addressing five key recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Under the reforms, any criminal charges laid against an applicant for serious sexual, violent or drug offences will be considered as part of Working With Children (WWC) Check assessments, regardless of whether they resulted in a conviction or finding of guilt.

The WWC Check Unit can now consider non-conviction charges that may have been dismissed on a technicality, or did not proceed because of the impact on the victim, when deciding on whether to grant an application.

The amendment brings Victoria into line with other states and territories.

Kinship carers – a family member or other person of significance to a child who has been placed in out-of-home care – will now be required to obtain a WWC Check.

From May next year, all new kinship carers will be required to obtain a WWC Check within 21 days of becoming a carer.

Existing kinship carers will have three months from May 1 to apply, and all applications for new and existing kinship carers will be free of charge.

The laws remove the element of supervision from the definition of child-related work – ensuring WWC Checks are required whether contact with children is supervised or not.

Children will be better protected from online predators under the new definition of direct contact, which now includes written, oral and electronic communication and technologies.

An applicant will also be forced to produce further information if they are suspected of breaching the *Working with Children Act 2005*, such as engaging in child-related work without a current WWC Check.

WWC Checks were first introduced in Victoria in April 2006 and more than 1.95 million checks have been issued during the past 10 years.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Martin Pakula

“The safety of our kids is our top priority. That’s why we’re introducing new laws which will make the application process for Working with Children Checks stricter and more thorough.”

“Every child deserves to be safe while in the care of others. These laws address key recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to help protect our kids from harm.”