



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF NEW ZEALAND

TE KAUNIHERA WAHINE O AOTEAROA

25 October 2013

S13.19

Submission to the Social Services Select Committee on the Vulnerable Children Bill 150-1

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 30 organisations affiliated at national level and a further 40 organisations affiliated at branch level. It has 22 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of these organisations, as well as individual members. NCWNZ's function is to represent and promote the interests of New Zealand women through research, discussion and action.

This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Justice and Law Reform Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Watch Committee after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ.

Introduction

NCWNZ has a long history of promoting legislation to improve the outcomes for children and their families for the purpose of each and every child thriving, belonging, achieving and being supported by caring parents, family and whanau and networks.

NCWNZ has previously made many submissions on this and related topics, including the Green Paper on Vulnerable Children.

Responding members are generally supportive of the provisions contained in the Vulnerable Children Bill, although some members opined that the measures to improve the lot of the vulnerable children would be more efficiently and effectively implemented by establishing a Ministry for Children and a Parliamentary Commissioner for Children.

Comments on specific clauses

Part 1

Cross-agency measures

Subpart 1 – Government priorities for vulnerable children and vulnerable children's plan

Clause 6

Improving the well-being of vulnerable children

Responding members endorse the measures listed in the clause provided that there are concrete plans of action, including enhancing and supporting existing and effective policies, and with adequate funding.

Clause 7**Government priorities for vulnerable children**

Responding members view the safety and well being of vulnerable children as paramount. There needs to be enhanced response to children who have been abused or neglected. Early intervention and follow up are important.

Clause 8**Preparation of vulnerable children's plan**

Some members do not have confidence that working across ministries is optimal and suggest that a centralised agency or ministry would capture quickly, efficiently and effectively all issues regarding children and their families and be in a position to constantly monitor and review.

Other members suggested that a separate Ministry for Children with the sole focus on wellbeing of children would be more efficient and effective to oversee the health and wellbeing of vulnerable children with the evaluation of outcomes by a Parliamentary Commissioner of Children and tabled in Parliament.

Subpart 2 – Child protection policies**Clause 19****Content of child protection policy**

Responding members unanimously supported the requirement of a child protection policy. The policy should provide for a catalogue of indicators of child abuse and neglect and mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect. There should be a shared data base across the state services with special attention to security of the information.

Subpart3 – Children's worker safety checking**Clause 31****Requirements of safety checks**

The majority of responding members supported the requirement for safety checks. However there was a concern that implementing worker checks should not be given priority over safety issues within families.

Some members were of the view that the safety checks should be required for all persons who take groups of children away on trips and given adequate training in all aspects of out of school roles.

Part 2**Child harm prevention orders****Clause 55****Court may make child harm prevention order**

Some responding members were concerned at the possible restrictions and consequences for family members who are not at risk and questioned where would the person subject to the order go and how would the person be monitored.

Part 3

Amendment to Acts

Subpart 1 – Amendments to Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989

Clause 106

New sections 18A to 18D inserted

18A

Assessment of person described in section 14(3)

The responding members generally supported this provision provided that the requirements were clearly enunciated to the parent. Some members were concerned that a sole social worker is required to prepare an assessment and were of the view that a team, or a social worker in consultation with other agencies, should complete the assessment.

The majority of responding members were concerned that a social worker is not required to be registered and were of the view that a social worker should be qualified and registered with regular monitoring and review processes in place, which in turn would give protection and accountability to the public and the vulnerable children.

Achieving independence

Clause 131

New section 386A and cross-heading inserted

New section 386, insert:

Transition from care to independence

386A Advice and assistance for people moving from care to independence

A member, who works in the community, related a situation she was involved in where the young woman had been a ward of state and had been shown the door. The young woman was not able to obtain assistance from WINZ because she did not have a birth certificate.

The member assisted the young woman to obtain her birth certificate and they went to WINZ for the young woman to access WINZ assistance. The member was shocked at the attitude of the WINZ employee being critical of the young woman having cancelled previous appointments. This was further compounded by the assistance cheque being sent to the wrong office and the stress of the young woman having the time limit of 48 hours to use the cheque.

The member accordingly supports the proposed amendment to address the need for assistance to independence.

Conclusion

NCWNZ is in general agreement with the aims for protecting the well-being of vulnerable children provided that there is adequate resourcing, robust processes and the requirement for social workers to be registered.

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