



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

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**Submission to The Children, Young Persons and Their Families
(Advocacy, Workforce And Aging Settings) Amendment Bill 142-1**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine O Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing 288 organisations affiliated at either the National level or to one of our 20 branches. In addition to our organisational membership about 260 women are individual members of branches.

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. This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Family Affairs Standing Committee and The Parliamentary Watch Committee of NCWNZ following discussion between members of these committees, and based on prior submissions and existing NCWNZ policy.

1. Introduction

NCWNZ has a long history of advocating for the support of children and young persons, especially those living in precarious circumstances that cause them to be considered vulnerable. In view of this history NCWNZ applauds the proposed amendments of this Bill.

However, NCWNZ feels that, given the legislation's aim of extending State responsibility for the care and protection of vulnerable young persons, it would be judicious to amend the definition of a young person to include 20 year olds, in line with the Age of Majority Act 1970. Such an adjustment would provide young persons with much needed stability and security, and a better opportunity to become independent and self supporting. NCWNZ heartily supports the objectives of the Bill to create a child-centred system in which children's participation and views are sought, and in which advocacy and other key services for young persons are made more readily accessible.

2. Clause 4 Section 2 Amended (Interpretation)

NCWNZ has commented in the past regarding the age of majority, pointing out the inconsistencies of the age of majority in various Acts. We refer in particular to Section 8 of the Care of the Children Act 2004, Section 2 of the Adoption Act 1970 , following amendment by the Age of Majority Act 1970. A key message in the Green Paper on Vulnerable Children is 'The Government's vision for children is that every child should thrive, belong and achieve'. In order to attain this goal, an individual's

circumstances must be considered, and given that some young persons are still at school at the age of 18, it is fitting and logical that State care is continued in order for them to complete secondary school as a minimum.

3. Clause 6 Section 7 amended (Duties of Chief Executive), and Clause 8 Section 11 replaced (Duty of Court and Counsel to encourage and assist child or young person to participate in proceedings)

NCWNZ is heartened by the significance of these Clauses, which detail the situations where, and means by which, children and young persons will be provided with the support and opportunity to express their views on key matters relating to the child's or young person's care. It is imperative that the children and young persons, as key stakeholders, are not only encouraged, but assisted, to contribute to the system and processes through which they receive State care.

The Bill's aim to support the establishment of independent advocacy services is welcomed by NCWNZ. This aligns with a previous submission commenting on the document: Local Services Mapping, Communities and Child, Youth and Family Working Together, endorsing collaboration of State and community efforts to protect vulnerable children.

NCWNZ'S 2007 submission, Agenda for Children Revisited, notes the ability to access the services children need is further hindered by a) long waiting lists, b) unavailability of trained professionals, and c) unacceptably high levels of those needing to access these services waiting to reach the assessment stage. It is hoped that the proposed amendments with delegation of Chief Executive to other professionals beyond the role of Social Worker, will lead to improved outcomes for children and young persons in State care.

Having timely access to required services, providing stability and consistency with guardians, key workers, and schooling will lead to empowerment of young persons, thereby ensuring future self confidence and skills of independence when they reach maturity.

Past cases of children being injured, abused or dying while either on waiting lists to be allocated placement or already in State care, have shown the present system is not working. The review is timely, and having this overhaul of the present system, increasing the number of Social Workers, reducing Social Workers' loads, and providing more training and monitoring for foster parents can only improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young persons.

NCWNZ requests that the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, along with gender and cultural diversity are taken into consideration in the creation of this legislation. Great care must be taken to ensure appointment of appropriate caregivers and Social Workers. Children and young persons must be treated equally and receive the same rights and opportunities irrespective of race or gender.

5. Conclusion

NCWNZ has welcomed the opportunity to make a submission on this Bill, and as in the past, endorses all efforts to secure brighter, safer futures for all children of Aotearoa. The policies of the past have

created unacceptably high numbers of vulnerable children, and it is hoped that this Children, Young Persons and Their Families (Advocacy, Workforce and Age Settings) Amendment Bill will significantly improve the outcomes for children and young persons who are cared for by the State.

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