



**SUBMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
ON THE DRAFT CHILDREN'S AMENDMENT BILL**

Written by Eric Atmore and Jaclyn Murray

27 September 2006

CONTACT DETAILS:

Jaclyn Murray
National Early Childhood Development Alliance
P O Box 2248
Clareinch
7740
Tel: 021 683 2420
Fax: 021 683 5838
Email: cecd@iafrica.com

CHILDREN'S AMENDMENT BILL

Making the case for Early Childhood Development

It is universally recognised that a child's early years are critical for the acquisition of the concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning, and it has been repeatedly shown that high quality early childhood development (ECD) programmes help to break the cycle of poverty.

The High/Scope Perry Preschool project identified that investing in quality early childhood development has many positive returns later on in life. Children who attend a quality ECD programme are:

- More likely to perform better in school
- More likely to find a job when they leave school
- Less likely to need remedial education
- Less likely to become involved in crime
- Girls are less likely to become pregnant whilst a teenager

Furthermore, research by Dr David Weikart has shown that in America for every \$1 invested in ECD programmes, there is a cost savings to society of \$ 17.07. This savings comes from reduced public expenditure on welfare, education and social services. We believe that in South Africa the same return on investment will happen.

However, in South Africa the early childhood sector continues to be vastly under-resourced, with minimal budgetary commitment to ECD services. The Department of Education commits less than 1% of its annual budget to early childhood development. It costs Government R 120 per day to keep a prisoner in prison each day of the year, while the Grade R subsidy ranges from R3 - R6 per child per school going day. This subsidy is further restricted to payment for a maximum of 30 children per site even though many ECD centres have more children enrolled.

The social development subsidy for ECD ranges from R3 – R7 per child per attendance day and is way below what is necessary for quality ECD provision.

The biggest challenges facing early childhood development in South Africa are to increase access to ECD programmes and to improve the quality of these programmes.

Poor urban children and poor children from rural areas do not have the same access to ECD services as children from higher-income urban groups. Much of the pre-schooling that does occur for these children takes place in cramped, dilapidated and unhygienic conditions. As a result of this many, many children start their formal school journey severely under-prepared. This has numerous consequences – poor learning, high rates of grade repetition, failure and attrition.

The various policies affecting early childhood development, such as the Education White paper number 5, are inadequate and do not meet the needs of young children especially in vulnerable communities. This is clear when only between 17% and 20% of all children in our country have access to ECD services and much of this is of poor quality.

The Children's Bill must take account of the inadequacies outlined and, in Chapter 5 and 6 on Partial Care and Early Childhood Development respectively, ensure that the Department of Social Development commits both politically and financially to increasing access to ECD services for young children.

The National Early Childhood Development Alliance urges changes to the Bill on a number of clauses which are as follows:

SUBMISSIONS

CHAPTER 5: PARTIAL CARE

NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE		
CLAUSE	PROPOSED AMENDMENT	DISCUSSION
81 (c)(iii)	Delete third sub- clause in 81 (c) .	Having a fee requirement would limit vulnerable communities and groups from applying for registration. This is an unnecessary barrier to access for most vulnerable children.
90 (a)	Remove the phrase “and the fees to be paid”.	Having a fee requirement would limit vulnerable communities and groups from applying for registration. This is an unnecessary barrier to access for most vulnerable children.
Possible Additions	Add a paragraph on disabilities. Partial care facilities are to be adapted to meet the needs of children with disabilities and chronic illness.	A paragraph on children with disabilities must be added. Opportunities for young children with disabilities and chronic illness are critical.

CHAPTER 6: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

CLAUSE	PROPOSED AMENDMENT	DISCUSSION
91	“from birth to school-going age” is suitable here.	School- going age cannot be lowered to 4 as that would not account for the many 5/6 year olds in early childhood development programmes that do not fall under the Department of Education and therefore still need to be recognised, funded and regulated by the DSD.
91 (1)	“mental” must change to “cognitive”	The learning aspect of an ECD programme must be recognised. This is emphasised by using the word “cognitive”.
92	Add the words “The Minister of Health” as follows: ...”the Minister, after consultation with the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health, must	It is important to include the Minister of Health especially when one looks at nutrition. Also if we talk about Integrated Early Childhood Development then the Health Ministry must be involved.
93	Delete the words “...designated child protection organisation” add words “or a non-profit organisation”. To now read “...by an organ of the state, or a non-profit organisation”	We think that “designated child protection organisation” is an error (It is not in the Partial Care chapter) and needs to be removed. We must add “non-profit organisations” since most early childhood development provision is provided by the non-profit sector. It is essential that non-profit organisations be included here. We think that this was omitted in error.
93	Insert a clear obligation on MEC to provide and fund ECD programmes: 93 (1) The MEC must ensure the provision of quality ECD programmes for children. (1) (2) (2) (3)....	ECD is essential for children to reach their full potential in life. Children must have access to ECD quality programmes in a safe, caring, nurturing environment.
93	Add after 93 (1):	Many vulnerable communities

	“Despite sub-section (1) above, programmes that do not comply with the norms and standards may qualify for conditional registration and conditional funding in order to assist them to comply with the national norms and standards.”	need assistance to meet the minimum norms and standards in order to qualify for registration.
94	NORMS and standards must be the title here.	It is imperative that the head of social development ensure that there are norms and standards for early childhood development services.
94	Add a new clause (4) to read: “Any early childhood development services must provide a learning programme appropriate to the needs of the children to whom the services are provided”	A clause that emphasises that in early childhood development facilities there must be an education/learning programme that provides learning opportunities for children attending that facility.
95 (2) c (ii)	Remove clause (2) (c) (ii)	Having a fee requirement would limit vulnerable communities and groups from applying for registration. This is an unnecessary barrier to access for the most vulnerable children.
97	Insert a clause providing for financial assistance upon conditional assistance.	Many vulnerable communities need assistance to meet the minimum norms and standards in order to qualify for registration.
100	Insert words “financial assistance and” before the word “advice”: To now read “ may give financial assistance and advice to a partial care facility... ”	Financial assistance must be provided to enable early childhood development providers to meet the registration standards.
101 (1)	“ suitably qualified person ” must be inserted, to read: “A provincial head of social development may authorise a suitably qualified person to assess...”	This ensures that the person appointed by the head of social development to assess the provision of ECD services/programmes is qualified to do so.
103	Remove from clause (b) the words “...and the fees to be paid”. To now read “ ...the procedure to be followed in connection with ... ”	Having a fee requirement would limit vulnerable communities and groups from applying for registration. This is an unnecessary barrier to access for the most vulnerable children.

NOTE: The Minister MUST (not may) provide early childhood development services (this must be obligatory).