

21 October 2006

Attention: Monica Vaas
mvaas@gautengleg.gov.za

RE: SUBMISSION FROM CHILDLINE GAUTENG ON THE S76 CHILDREN'S AMMENDMENT BILL

Childline Gauteng has several projects that work directly with children who are at risk:

- the toll free 24 hour crisis line that receive between 13 000 and 20 000 calls monthly with regards to all issues regarding children.
- The Sunlight Safe House project is directly linked to the crisis line and offer a unique service to children who are removed by SAPS after hours.
- The clinical project that offers counseling services to children and their families who have been abused, bereaved or present with behaviour problems.
- the schools programme is preventative in nature and focuses on children's rights and responsibilities. Approximately 6000 children are reached monthly through this programme. Very often children are referred from the school programme for further intervention to our other projects.

We are therefore well placed to comment on issues pertaining to the protection of children.

Childline Gauteng welcomes the positive provisions made by the S76 Children's Bill and would like to make the following comments:

1. Section 105 (1) and (2) is welcomed in terms of reporting a child in need of care and protection, section 105(2) states that any person who believes that a child in need of care, may report it to a relevant organisation. It is felt however that the Act does not make provision for the protection of people who, in good faith report alleged abuse.
2. Section 106 (4)(b) that describes child protection services should include the long term supervision of foster parents. This is not adequately dealt with in this section or in sections 180 to 189 that deals with foster care. This would prevent the breakdown of foster placements and the harm done to children who have already suffered the devastating effects of separation from their biological family. Child protection does not stop once a child is placed in alternative care.
3. Section 136 is welcomed as it recognises Child headed households, and also makes provision for adult supervision of the child headed household. It is felt, however that prevention and early intervention services to this particular

vulnerable group, should be strengthened. This would include a range of services like material assistance, support services and educational services.

4. Section 139 deals with corporal punishment. This section prohibits anyone, other than parents to administer corporal punishment. It is strongly felt that parents should also be prohibited from administering corporal punishment. To allow the Department time to take reasonable steps to ensure education and awareness raising concerning the effects of corporal punishment and to develop programmes promoting appropriate discipline we suggest a 5 year moratorium on this section. (only in terms of prohibiting parents from administering corporal punishment)
5. Section 141, prohibiting the worst forms of child labour, is welcomed as a protective measure.
6. *Section 143 to 149 is welcomed. It is high time that prevention and early intervention services are prescribed in the Act. Neither the Department of Social Development nor designated welfare organisations have done justice to children and families in terms of rendering preventive and early intervention services. Intervention seems to happen when families are at a crisis level.

*As a counseling and referral organisation who take up to 20 000 calls per month from children and adults on our 24 hour crisis line, we are concerned at the ongoing deterioration of services to children. There appears to be a disintegration and fragmentation of services to children at risk. This includes social and support services, as well as police services.

Recently we received a report from a school, that 2 children under 10 had been left unattended for several days in a flat, after their single mother was arrested by the police. This case was not referred to social services. The school referred the case to a designated welfare organisation who referred them back to the police. Only the were the children removed.

A case of a child under 12 years who had been severely beaten by her mother was reported to a designated welfare organisation. This organisation had to be convinced to accept the case for further investigation and when the mother did not appear for her appointment the following day, it took a week for the social worker to follow up.

We applaud the fact that the focus has also been appropriately placed on developing parenting skills and the capacity of parents to safeguard their children. Very few programmes of this nature has been developed and successfully administered in traditional child protection services. It is also felt that awareness programmes and life skills programmes in schools should also be included in prevention and early intervention services.

Taking into account the high level of poverty and unemployment in our country, it is felt that preventive and early intervention programmes can only be attempted with strong and

active participation and the increase of social security. There is no point in developing the parent's capacity to safeguard their children, if they have no shelter or food. It is strongly recommended that the age ceiling of 14 years for children who receive the child support grant must be lifted.

To strengthen the Child Protection services it is felt that an in-depth enquiry should be made into the nature of these services.

A balanced approach to Child protection, needs to be taken, that includes mass preventative programmes as well as intensive personalised services.

Social Workers and policemen have unmanageably high caseloads and earn poor salaries. To render effective Child Protection services their needs to be a strict monitoring of the number of cases each individual deals with, under adequate supervision.

7. Section 180 to 189 deals very extensively with foster care. In the light of the fact that the number of children in foster care has increased by 600% since 2000 it is strongly recommended that a greater distinction is made between the placement of children, who are removed because of poverty, and children orphaned by HIV/AIDS and children who are abused, abandoned or neglected.

This would allow the already poorly resourced designated welfare organisations to render effective services to the latter group. (abused neglected and abandoned.) Poverty alleviation and HIV/AIDS services should not be dependent on statutory services.

Childline Gauteng would like to thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the Children's Amendment Bill.

Yours faithfully

Aileen Langley
(H.O.D Children's Services)
Tel: 011 645 2000