

Media Information

**From: Action on Rights for Children (ARCH)
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RIGHTS GROUP SLAMS CHILDREN'S BILL AS "AN OPEN INVITATION TO CHILD ABUSERS"

Action on Rights for Children (ARCH), the UK-wide network of parents and young people committed to upholding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, has roundly condemned the Children's Bill published today (Thursday) as being "profoundly dangerous and anti-children".

Asserting that measures outlined within it offer "an open invitation to child abusers", the group has challenged the government to provide a cast-iron guarantee that paedophiles will not be able to exploit the myriad of sensitive personal information that is to be held on databases and routinely shared by an unknown number of 'professional' users from a wide range of agencies.

Dismissing the government's claims that the Bill will safeguard vulnerable children, and condemning the covert surveillance of all children as "an outrageous intrusion into family life", ARCH spokesperson Terri Dowty said:

"As concerned and responsible parents, we deplore the government's plans to effectively endanger our children by entering their personal details on a database to which countless unknown individuals will be allowed access.

"We only have to look at the spate of recent prosecutions of 'caring' professionals who have abused children - teachers, police officers, social workers and others - to seriously question the government's judgement in promoting such an ill-conceived and dangerous scheme.

"Our members are outraged by the suggestion that our children should all be subject to surveillance by strangers, who, unlike parents, may not have their best interests at heart. It is an unacceptable intrusion into the lives of families who are responsible for bringing up their children and for ensuring their safety is not compromised.

"Hacking a database is relatively straightforward, so how do they propose to keep our children's details secure and out of the hands of paedophiles? Besides, we have rarely seen a government-inspired database that functions properly, so what will happen to children who are genuinely at risk when this one malfunctions or collapses, as it inevitably will?

"We want to see a full risk assessment carried out on this proposed database, as we believe it will endanger children rather than protect them. The accuracy and security of data can never be guaranteed, and the whole concept conflicts with existing data protection legislation and Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

"The case of Victoria Climbié, who died despite being known to numerous 'protection' agencies, is a tragic example of abject failure on the part of professionals who did nothing to intervene in circumstances where a child was known to be at serious risk. How, therefore, can the surveillance of the entire child population - with its related resource implications for child welfare agencies - be justified, when that small minority of children who genuinely are at serious risk continue to fall through the safety net?

"ARCH challenges the government to enter into a public debate on this issue. Our children's safety must not be jeopardised by a scheme which denies them their fundamental right to privacy and allows their personal details to be accessed and scrutinised by any number of 'professional' strangers."

ENDS

Note to Editors:

For details of ARCH, see www.arch-ed.org

ARCH is a network of families throughout the UK. The following are spokespeople on the Children Bill:

please contact ARCH for more details