

PRESS NOTICE FROM ACTION ON RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

7TH May 2004

Families and young people will descend on London's Grosvenor Square on Tuesday May 11th to protest at Government plans to place every child in England and Wales under surveillance.

The Children Bill will allow the Government powers to establish a database system and order all professionals - even doctors - to share information about children and their parents, overruling any common law duty of confidentiality.

The protest will coincide with the Government's UK IT Summit to discuss the UK's e-government agenda, taking place in the Millennium Hotel in Grosvenor Square.

Alison Preuss, Vice-Chair of Action on Rights for Children (ARCH) says:
"Although the Government claims that the Children Bill is about child protection, we know perfectly well that it is part of the e-government plan to put the records of everyone in the UK on to a central database.

"We are disgusted that they are relying on 'child protection' to deflect criticism, and using Victoria Climbié as cover for sweeping in a policy that was being framed before the Laming Inquiry into her death even opened.

"We have a desperate shortage of skilled social workers throughout the UK, and crowding a database with information about every child will stretch services to breaking point. What will happen to the children who really are at risk? Would Victoria Climbié even have been noticed in the forest of trivial data that this legislation will create?

"The Government does not have a good track record with databases, and families are concerned that children will be put at risk by failing systems and poor security. A database could easily become a paedophile's address book."

ARCH's lawyer, Ian Dowty, says: "The scale of the powers that the Government is seeking from Parliament is almost limitless. The Children Bill will give Government completely unacceptable powers to intrude into the lives of blameless families, whilst increasing the likelihood that children at risk of harm will be overlooked.

"The powers the Government seeks will bypass the protection of the Data Protection Act and overturn rights to confidentiality. Children and their families will not know what is being recorded about them and whether it is even accurate. Opinions will be confused with facts."

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CONTACT: Archrights@aol.com

ARCH Office Tel: 020 8558 9317

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

1) ARCH - Action on Rights for Children - is an Internet-based UK-wide network of families committed to the rights of children. Through its network, ARCH disseminates information to families, and gathers opinions on issues affecting children in order to represent them to policy-makers at both local and national level. For more information see: <http://www.arch-ed.org>

2) The Children Bill is online at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200304/ldbills/035/2004035.htm>

3) The Performance & Innovation Unit Report 'Privacy & Data-Sharing: the way forward' published April 2002 is at:

<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/su/privacy/11.htm>