Consultation on the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Bill

About you

Individual

1 The Bill’s general principles

1.1 Do you support the principles of the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Bill?

— No

1.2 Please outline your reasons for your answer to question 1.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

There is already legislation in place to protect children from abuse. A mild smack is NOT abuse. A light smack on a well padded rump is a means of stopping a child either in throes of a tantrum or on the brink of doing something dangerous. Young children can be more traumatised by alternatives such as the naughty step because they cannot remember why they are in trouble, only that they have been ostracised. A quick, light smack at the time links the punishment to the action. It is quite wrong to criminalise loving parents who want to bring their children up to be responsible citizens; this requires appropriate discipline and as I have already explained suitable physical punishment is part of this. You risk creating a generation of feral children whose parents are unable to control because they have been too scared to exercise early discipline. If a child knows that a parent may smack them, it often becomes unnecessary to do so - the 'look' is enough, but ONLY if it is implicit that the deterrent remains and can be used. I can’t remember my parents smacking me, but I knew they would if necessary and that was enough. Just because "81% of parents disagreed with the statement "it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child compared to 71% in 2015" it does not mean that this is true - many parents are afraid to say what they really think because of the perceived Nanny State - and was that a representative sample anyway? Look at the inaccuracy of opinion polls! I am also wary of statements such as "The majority of researchers in the field make the judgement that all physical punishment under all conditions
is potentially harmful to children" because it depends on the parameters of the research (including the funding) and the definition of "all physical punishment" and the innate bias of many who engage in this type of exercise.

1.3 Do you think there is a need for legislation to deliver what this Bill is trying to achieve?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

Absolutely NOT. Parents need support not threats of criminalisation. Please allow parents to be parents, it is a hard enough job as it is. But appropriate discipline is part of responsible parenting - and that includes an infrequent light smack. Too often those who oppose this conflate a measured light tap with beating the life of of a child with a blunt instrument - this says more about them than responsible parents. There is already legislation in place to address genuine abuse, but the current proposals tar all parents with the same brush. I fully accept that some children do not need much discipline, but others do and banning smacking removes one of the proven means of child rearing. The weight of the law needs to be against the genuine abusers - this will not be the case if responsible parents are investigated for reasonable chastisement.

2 The Bill’s implementation

2.1 Do you have any comments about any potential barriers to implementing the Bill? If no, go to question 3.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

I think it will prove almost unworkable and could further break down the family unit which has been proved to be one of the important building blocks of society. Will children be expected to ‘inform’ on parents? What about malicious accusations where the family unit is already strained? This has all sorts of unintended consequences and feels quite Orwellian.

2.2 Do you think the Bill takes account of these potential barriers?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

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3 Unintended consequences

3.1 Do you think there are any unintended consequences arising from the Bill? If no, go to question 4.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

There are real dangers in the further undermining of the family unit. Criminalising responsible parents is not the way forward. There are huge consequences in wider life - will a teacher or
nurse who taps their toddler on a nappies behind be banned from their profession? Will there be a greater incidence of family break down as trust and discipline are eroded? Will the real abusers get away with it whilst too much time is wasted investigating mild cases? What about malicious accusations from disgruntled children or embittered neighbours? What will that do to communities? Parents who are finding a child becoming increasingly wayward may be deterred from seeking help for fear that they will be criminalised for trying to control the child using reasonable physical chastisement. This cannot be good for the family or the community.

4 Financial implications

4.1 Do you have any comments on the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum)? If no, go to question 5.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

We have finite resources. The costs of investigating minor indiscretions could be enormous and take funds away from genuine cases of child abuse, with potentially disastrous consequences.

5 Other considerations

5.1 Do you have any other points you wish to raise about this Bill?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

The logic behind this bill is flawed. By all means promote alternatives to physical chastisement - if they are proven workable, then they will be adopted by osmosis and become the norm, but DON’T criminalise parents who chose to use physical chastisement. It is unlikely to be effective and will create further antagonism against the Nanny State. There are many other areas that deserve the attention of Welsh Government, this is NOT one of them.