

Press Release

Tuesday 13 August 2013

Commissioner welcomes greater protection for vulnerable children

The Children's Commissioner, Dr Russell Wills, says the announcement of legislative changes to protect vulnerable children reflects an important shift in the balance between respecting a parent's rights and ensuring a child's right to be safe.

"Minister Bennett's announcement reflects an elevation of the rights and needs of children, and signals a very welcome change in social norms in New Zealand by clearly focusing on the behaviour of adults to help keep children safe.

"I'm sure there will be strong interest in initiatives such as the introduction of Child Harm Prevention Orders and some may say they go too far. Many more New Zealanders will welcome the protection they offer to our most vulnerable children.

"The orders, and other changes such as requiring some parents to prove they are safe to parent, will give those working with these children additional tools to help keep them safe.

"The changes around guardianship will create more stable care by stopping parents putting unreasonable limits on a child and their Home for Life carer, for example by refusing to let the child go on holiday or school camp, or be immunised.

"Joint accountability for a cross agency plan will give extra weight to the needs of vulnerable children. As a paediatrician, I have experienced challenges around getting access for children to services such as education or behavioural support. Those of us working with vulnerable children will now be able to count on the support of all agencies to deliver an effective response for them.

"I would encourage the Minister to consider whether independent oversight or evaluation of the implement of the plan and the outcomes it delivers would strengthen it further.

"While there is still work to be done to develop the details around some initiatives, the Minister's announcement provides a sensible and welcome package of measures to enhance the wellbeing of our most vulnerable children."

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For more information or to talk to Dr Wills please contact Caroline Wakelin, Principal Media Advisor, Office of the Children's Commissioner, 027 696 5101