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Media release

Select Committee option the best - Section 59 debate

Today a consortium of child and family community groups gave public endorsement of the Select Committee's amendment of the Section 59 repeal bill. The endorsement was given at a press conference at Parliament called by Sue Bradford MP (Sponsor of the Bill) and Lynne Pillay MP (Chair of the Justice and Electoral Committee which drafted the amended Bill)

"Our preference is for full repeal of Section 59," said Murray Edridge, Chief Executive of Barnardos. "But we recognise the political reality means that is not going to occur now. Therefore we favour the Select Committee amendment which passed its second reading three weeks ago. It is preferable to the proposal put forward by National MP Chester Borrows. The Select Committee's amendment does go some way towards acknowledging the status and importance of children."

Beth Wood of EPOCH NZ notes that Duncan Webb, Law Professor at Canterbury University, believes that the Borrows' proposal would be a retrograde step resulting in less protection for children from that currently available.

"We know Mr Borrows is trying to offer greater protection to children, but Professor Webb's assessment coincides with our own careful analysis of the Borrows' proposal," she said. "In the fourth briefing sheet our organisations prepared for MPs we concluded it was a deficient measure that would not be in the best interests of children or parents."

The Bill enters the next stage of parliamentary debate tomorrow, Wednesday, 14 March. It is expected that Chester Borrows will introduce his proposal at this stage.

The community organisations' strong conclusions are —

- The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Bill offers genuine improved protection to the children of New Zealand;
- Conscientious and loving parents have nothing to fear from the Bill
- There will not be a sudden increase in Police prosecutions or CYF Service interventions as a consequence of the Bill becoming law.

Deborah Morris-Travers, Project Manager of Every Child Counts, concluded by noting that it was essential for the Government to produce clear educative material on the meaning of the law change itself immediately it is passed.

Copies of the four MPs briefing sheets are attached. Their titles are —

- No.1 *A time for change?*
- No.2 *Will repeal criminalise parents?*
- No.3 *What the Crimes amendment Bill achieves.*
- No.4 *Assessing the Chester Borrows' proposal.*

They were produced by Barnardos New Zealand, EPOCH NZ, National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, Save the Children New Zealand, UNICEF New Zealand.

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