

Children's Bill Working Group Subgroup on Discipline of Children  
MEDIA ADVISORY  
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**COMMITTEE SEEKS TO PROTECT PARENTS FROM PROSECUTION**

Today the National Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Social Development are set to vote on a clause to give children equal protection from violence. This clause considers the prohibition of corporal punishment by parents.

This is a critical provision to ensure that the law offers protection to the most vulnerable members of our society. Currently corporal punishment of children by parents is allowed and children are subjected to a range of serious violence that is considered outrageous if committed against an adult under the name of corporal punishment. Current legal provisions that allow only moderate violence against children, violate their rights to physical integrity and equality and in addition have not effectively afforded children protection from serious harm

South Africa continues to experience extremely high rates of abuse of children as well as high rates of violence in general. Research is clear that childhood experiences of violence strongly influence violent behaviour in adults. It is critical that we seek to shift the way that we teach children to deal with frustration and conflict in order to ensure a future society that is less quick to resort to violence.

The purpose of a change in law is not firstly to punish but rather to promote change of behaviour in society.

Current indications from discussions in the committee are that should the committee decide to prohibit corporal punishment they would take positive approach that is aimed at keeping children safer and not a punitive approach to parents.

The prosecution of parents for using corporal punishment is unlikely to be in the best interests of the child. Thus the committee engaged in discussion on how best to ensure that parents have access to programmes that are supportive and provide information and education on positive discipline of children. Discussion yesterday afternoon indicates that members of the committee in support of prohibition, argue that prosecution of parents for assaulting children is only advisable in serious cases.

Various versions of the clause will be voted on in the Committee later today, the Committee will then continue to discuss other aspects of the bill before it is referred back to the National Council of Provinces for further discussion and finalisation.

Ends

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The Sub Group on Discipline of Children consists of the following organisations:  
Childline South Africa; South African Council of Churches; Community Law Centre,  
University of the Western Cape; Centre for Child Law, University of Pretoria; Resources  
Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Save the Children Sweden,  
Management Systems and Training Programme; Mthatha Child Abuse Resources Centre;