



Children 1st Parliamentary Briefing on Coronavirus (Scotland) Bill

1st April 2020

Children 1st fully appreciates the unprecedented challenge posed by COVID-19 and through our work is increasingly aware of the significant impact of both the virus and the necessary measures to contain it on vulnerable children and their families already facing complex problems. As Scotland's national children's charity, with over 130 years of experience of keeping children safe, we commend the work of the Scottish Government and our extraordinary public services and fully support the introduction of necessary and proportionate measures to fulfil and protect the right to health and the right to life.

It is clear that it is necessary to make adjustments of provisions and protections for children and families for a limited time, and to ensure that innovative and creative ways are introduced at speed to adapt existing services and systems to the current crisis. However, we encourage MSPs to fully consider the impact of the measures proposed in the Coronavirus Bill to protect children and families and to balance this with the need to safeguard their rights within the context of the current situation.

Evidence has demonstrated that in times of crisis children are more likely to be at risk from harm and need more protections, not less. The Parliament has a key role to play in guaranteeing that children's rights to have their voices heard, to have their best interests taken into account and to be safe from harm are protected. We strongly encourage the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government to keep under constant review the provisions set out within the Bill, to ensure that they are balanced and proportionate and to continually scrutinise the use of them, in particular those relating to children and families.

We encourage MSPs to fully consider the briefings from the [Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland](#) and the [Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights \(Together\)](#) and echo many of the concerns they have raised about the impact of these measures on children's rights. Children 1st would welcome reassurance and clarity over the way in which some of the proposed changes will operate in practice. In particular, the extension of timescales for emergency placements into secure accommodation, for Child Assessment Orders and for Child Protection Orders; protections for 16 and 17 year olds; the continued participation of children in the Hearings; and the changes to the way in which a Panel will be comprised.

Although we welcome the increased use of electronic means to connect families to Children's Hearings we are concerned that some families will not be able to access the required technology to support their attendance. This is an issue that must be addressed as a matter of urgency and indeed more broadly Children 1st is keen to work alongside the Scottish Government to ensure that all families that need it are able to access the technology to improve connectivity to vital services, education information and their communities at this challenging time.

We add our voice to the calls for ongoing assessment of the impact of this legislation through robust Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to get in touch with our Policy Manager, Chloe Riddell (07875 419567).