



MEDIA RELEASE
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Protect Children From Sexualisation and Abuse – Priority 2010

WORK STILL TO BE DONE TO GIVE PARENTS CERTAINTY ON SMACKING LAW...

Family First NZ has released its annual list of the top family issues to be tackled, and heading the list for 2010 is the protection of children from 'corporate pedophilia' and reducing the 'raunch culture' which is harming the self-esteem, body image and academic performance of young people – especially young girls.

"The recent marketing of sexualised shirts by *Cotton On Kids* to be worn by babies, the provocative *Little Losers* line targeted at young teenagers by clothing store *Jay Jays*, sexually charged billboard advertising in public places, and graphic sexual music videos, dolls, and tween magazines and websites which encourage young people to look older and act older are examples of marketers crossing the line of what is acceptable and appropriate for our communities and for the protection of our children," says Bob McCoskrie, National Director of Family First NZ.

"A premature interest in a sexy appearance, an obsession about body image as a teenager, and an undermining of the social prohibition against seeing children as sexual objects and sexually attractive, are all huge warning flags that profits are currently more important than protecting the wellbeing of our children."

Also in the list is a call to establish a Royal Commission of Enquiry into the real causes of child abuse, and a number of measures to recognise and respect the role of parents, including parental notification laws and amending the anti-smacking law to give parents certainty under the law.

The list calls for the urgent establishment of an independent CYF Complaints Authority, and amending the prostitution law to protect communities and families from street prostitution and residential brothels.

"There is still huge work to be done on reducing our child abuse rates, but also making sure that CYF and other statutory agencies don't overstep their levels of intervention. The government is also hoping that the smacking debate will disappear, but while parents are trying to raise law abiding productive members of society, the debate will not be going away. It will become an election issue if the government doesn't act to amend this law."

"The current government is attempting to stay clear of anything that might suggest social engineering," says Mr McCoskrie.

"But there are a number of social issues which this government must tackle if they wish to be respected by parents trying to raise children in an increasingly difficult culture which undermines their efforts."

ENDS

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FULL LIST

1. Laws and Codes of Advertising to protect children/young people from sexualised images and marketing of sexual messages towards children

The Australian Childhood Foundation released a report in Apr 2007, which showed that problem sexual behaviour in children as young as six, often appears to be influenced by sex imagery in the media. This is challenging the previously held view that most child sex abusers were responding to having being abused themselves.

And a recent report by the American Psychological Association points to the dangers when sexualisation leads to girls viewing themselves as objects and having an unhealthy preoccupation with appearance. The pressure can lead to depression, eating disorders, and poor academic performance.

Advertisements for kids' products should not include sexual imagery, imply that children are sexual beings, or imply that owning a product will enhance a child's sexuality.

As prominent Australian psychologist Steve Biddulph said, "...smarter parents protect their kids, but as the media environment and the shopping malls deteriorate, the kids with not very bright parents have their mental healthy and sexual health degraded."

There is also research suggesting that pedophilia and child pornography is being driven by the sexualisation of children in mainstream marketing.

2. Parental notification

A parent is required to sign a note giving permission for a child to go on a school trip to the zoo but does not have to be notified or give consent if the same daughter wants to use contraception or have an abortion, and can actually be sneaked off for the procedure by Family Planning or the school nurse. Some young girls have been targeted for vaccines by family doctors without the knowledge of the parents.

If parents are expected to support and raise their children to be law-abiding and positive members of our society, then these same parents should be kept informed and involved in the ongoing welfare of that child, and not undermined by laws which isolate children from their parents.

3. Establishing a Royal Commission of Enquiry into Child Abuse

We must take pro-active action and tackle head-on the difficult issues of family breakdown, drug and alcohol abuse, violence in our media, mental illness, low maternal age, and other key factors identified by the various UNICEF, CYF and Children's Commissioner reports.

Since the passing of the anti-smacking law, there has been a continual stream of child abuse cases and the rate of child abuse deaths has continued at the same rate as before the new law with at least 18 deaths since the law was passed. Sue Bradford was right when she said that her law was never intended to deal with the problem of child abuse.

Children will never be safe until we are honest enough as a country to identify and tackle the real causes of child abuse. An independent Inquiry free of political correctness and agendas would be an important first step

4. Amending the anti-smacking law to provide certainty for parents

The Prime Minister has confused parents by saying recently that a light smack is completely ok and should not be treated as a criminal offence, yet only a few months earlier admitting that the effect of the law is that smacking is a criminal offence.

The recent unbalanced and superficial review was another government-funded sales pitch for a flawed law which has been resoundingly rejected by New Zealanders. John Key promised 'comfort' for parents, but it's not comforting when he ignores almost 90% in a referendum, and retains a law which he admits is a 'dog's breakfast', badly drafted, and extremely vague.

A law that requires so many compromises, guidelines, helplines, reviews, and parent education could be easily fixed with a simple amendment - the Boscawen amendment. The politicians should demand a conscience vote on this issue, and the law should give parents certainty as to whether they are parenting within the law or not.

5. Establishing an Independent CYF Complaints Authority

Families who claim to have been unfairly treated by CYF social workers have no independent body to appeal to. This

is grossly unfair when families are at risk, ignored, or are being ripped apart often just based on the subjective judgment of a social worker.

An independent CYF Complaints Authority is also in the best interests of social workers as it will provide an independent body to ensure that appropriate policy and procedures have been followed. This will result in public confidence and accountability for actions and decisions by CYF workers.

There is a Health and Disability Commissioner, a Police Complaints Authority, even a Motor Vehicle Disputes Tribunal. We desperately need an independent body to hear complaints about the highly sensitive nature of intervening in families.

6. Amend the prostitution law to protect communities and families from street prostitution and residential brothels

The politicians gave local communities a 'hospital pass' when they changed the law and left the local councils the impossible job of balancing the requirements of the law with the huge concerns of families. They cannot now ignore the pleas from communities throughout NZ who are saying that the decriminalisation of prostitution has been a spectacular failure.

The opposition to a residential based brothel in the Wellington area, opposition to a brothel in the main street of Dannevirke, opposition to brothels being zoned for the main shopping areas in Lower Hutt, opposition to a sex parlour operating in the same building as a preschool in Wellington, Hamilton City Council's successful restriction on residential brothels, and attempts by the Manukau City Council to tackle the problems of street prostitution, shows that communities are not accepting the liberalised laws.