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Letters to the Editor



Legal aid cuts pose risks to family cases

Sir, We write to express concern over government proposals to remove legal aid in many family cases, which will be debated today in the House of Commons. The proposals assume that legal rights arising from personal choices are less important than others, notwithstanding that they touch the most intimate areas of life with consequences affecting adults and children throughout their lives.

Domestic violence will be a passport to legal aid, but is described solely as physical assault despite widely accepted definitions that include psychological harm and other forms of oppressive behaviour. Family issues are assumed to be resolved now only through adjudication or mediation, ignoring the vast bulk settled through lawyer-negotiation. In addition, the proposals contemplate removing legal representation from people alleged to have abused children or committed violence, and where paternity is challenged.

The proposals offer continuing support only for mediation, but this would allow rich or uncooperative parties to prevent any financial

assistance being provided to the other by refusing to mediate. The result of excluding lawyers from legal aid would be to increase the risk of unsafe arrangements for children; inevitably create further pressure on courts having to deal with many more unrepresented litigants; and incentivise pursuit of court orders on grounds of allegations of violence to gain access to legal advice and discourage their settlement by agreement. The supply of practitioners available to do family legal aid work in the few areas where legal aid remains would be threatened.

DAVID ALLISON

Chair, Resolution

STEPHEN COBB, QC

Chairman, Family Law Bar Association

MARY MACLEOD

Chair of Trustees, Gingerbread

PROFESSOR MARIANNE HESTER AND

PROFESSOR JUDITH MASSON

University of Bristol

Plus 11 signatories, whose names can be seen at thetimes.co.uk/letters

evaluate serious case reviews. There strong evidence that our evaluations serious case reviews have contribute to a dramatic improvement in their quality and timeliness. However, wit such reviews now to be published, there is an alternative lever for public accountability and transparency.

Given that the Chief Inspector wrote to the Minister last year to propose that we should now cease to evaluate serious case reviews, it is a distortion to suggest that we are being "stripped" of our powers.

Your suggestion that our inspectors are considered unqualified or unprepared is unjustified. Our inspectors in this area are skilled professionals, highly experienced and all have expertise in children's social care.

JOHN GOLDUP
National Director Inspection Development, Ofsted

History repeats...

Sir, As I taught my Year 8 Latin class yesterday, I could not help noticing certain sentences from the Cambridge Latin course:

Alexandria est urbs turbulenta. ingens turba semper urbem complet... multi milites per vias urbis procedunt (Alexandria is a restless city. A huge crowd always fills the city. Many soldiers are marching through the streets of the city).

Proof, if any were needed, of the continued relevance of a classical education.

JOHN DANT
Nonsuch High School
Cheam, Surrey

Ofsted inspectors

Sir, Your report ("Ofsted pays the price for blunders over Baby P", Feb 1) gave a distorted impression of Professor Eileen Munro's review of child protection in which she emphasises the "crucial role" of inspection in improving services for children.

Ofsted has been closely engaged with Professor Munro's review and we very much welcome its proposals. Indeed, we have ourselves argued strongly for a move to unannounced inspection as the norm and for an end to the requirement placed on Ofsted to



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