

## **Adoption Bill to be finalised on 7th December 2006 – Act Now**

Members of the Scottish Parliament will debate the Adoption and Children (Scotland) bill at its final stage on Thursday. This is the last opportunity to make changes to the bill. It contains provisions which will allow homosexual couples to adopt children. 89% of respondents to the consultation on this matter were against the proposal. Rather than giving evidence to support the good of homosexual adoption the argument has been turned on its head by politicians who are demanding that opponents prove that the change in the law is harmful.

This goes against common sense which dictates that a precautionary principle should be followed when introducing social changes. A change should be supported by evidence especially when the lives of children are involved.

Contact your MSP asking them to keep the law as it is on who should be permitted to adopt children.

Included below is the submission made by the Bishops' Conference to the Parliamentary proceedings.

### **Adoption and Children (Scotland) Bill A response from the Bishops' Conference of Scotland**

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Bill presently before the Education Committee. We are encouraged that it contains many positive proposals which will make a positive impact on the lives of the children who are unfortunately unable to remain with their natural family.

Our support for the positive proposals is, however, overshadowed by our deep concern over the intention to extend joint adoption to include unmarried and same-sex couples. Although it is argued that this is not a considerable change because single people who are cohabiting or in same-sex relationships are already adopting, there is little evidence that this is widespread. Only around 10% of placements are with single adopters and the majority of these are likely to be genuinely single. With adoptions at around 200 per year this leaves a tiny number of cases being used to justify a serious change in the perception of family composition.

We wish however to repeat the Church's views on the importance of the family and its stability founded on marriage between a man and woman. We do so in the belief that the suggestion to extend the opportunity to adopt jointly to unmarried and same-sex couples is not in the best interests of children.

Marriage is a fundamental human relationship that is reflected in all cultures. Man and woman united in marriage together with their children form the family. The well-being of the individual person and of society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life. The marital union also provides the best conditions for raising children: namely, the stable, loving

relationship of a mother and father present only in marriage.

These principles of marriage and the family, as the best conditions for raising children, should, we feel, guide the decision-making process in adoption. The Bill justly centres on the needs of the child and the need for “security, stability and permanence.” We would state that these conditions are best secured in a family built on marriage. The Bill proposes to extend the categories of those eligible to adopt to include unmarried couples who are, “living as partners in an enduring family relationship”. Marriage by which a man and a woman declare themselves as a couple before the law is the proven enduring family relationship. Other relationships lack the permanency of marital commitment. It seems odd that, wishing permanence and stability for children, the Bill intends to extend consideration to couples of the opposite sex who have not chosen to declare themselves legally to be a stable family unit. We wish specifically to highlight the finding indicated in Appendix B of the adoption review group report. It is noted that some studies suggest harmful outcomes in the lives of some children cared for by same sex couples. While not wishing to overstate these small studies, if the Bill is truly intended to act in the best interests of the child, it would not at this stage, without further research, seem opportune to extend consideration to same sex unmarried couples. The burden of proof lies with those who want to change the existing categories. This particular proposal is therefore irresponsible due to the lack of evidence, as well as a lack of support from consultation respondents, that it is not harmful to children. An evidence based approach informed by a precautionary attitude due to the vulnerability of the children who are subject to adoption is the only justifiable position in such an important area. One also wonders what the impact of extending the duty to consider parental views and those of older children would be if such a view was that they did not wish to be placed with a same sex couple. We note the level of opposition among respondents to the Executive’s proposals on permitting same-sex and unmarried couples to jointly adopt, 89% and 83% respectively. In light of the lack of evidence in support of the proposals, the failure of this opposition to effect change in the proposals raises concerns over the benefit or validity of having a consultation process at all. We therefore urge the committee to use its powers of scrutiny wisely and to give due regard to the views expressed in submitted evidence. We wish to raise our concerns as to the extension of the understanding of family beyond that of a married man and woman. We have, elsewhere, expressed our concern over the attempted re-shaping of family life through legislation and public policy. Much to our disappointment this bill continues that trend. We remind the parliament of its duty to uphold marriage, in that the social evidence in regard to stability and endurance of married relationships and the benefits to children are broadly known. We therefore urge the Committee to maintain the present restrictions on prospective adoptive parents. The issue of conscientious objection on the part of individuals and agencies who will be involved in adoption under the new regime should the proposals be carried forward unchanged need also to be considered. We sincerely hope that the proposals discussed above will be dropped due to the lack of evidence in support of change.