

Annice MacLeod submission of 3 February 2023

PE1979/L Establish an independent inquiry and an independent national whistleblowing officer to investigate concerns about the alleged mishandling of child safeguarding enquiries by public bodies

I write in support of Petition PE1979.

GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) is good when it works however, when it goes wrong, it goes terribly wrong.

I am supporting PE1979 because we need to find a solution for all children and not only for some. Social workers and the police require sufficient training so that they can operate within the law with clarity regarding who is the lead professional. The present system is open to abuse by un-scrupulous professionals.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman can deal with complaints, but they don't deal with crimes. The Crown Prosecution Service will only deal with crimes if they think it is in the public interest. The Police won't record crimes if their own officers are involved. Currently the "rights of the child" and the "rights of the parent" are ignored.

There is no point saying the "rights of the child" are enshrined in Scottish Law if those same children do not have a voice. Too often parents are pursued without being heard or their cases being properly investigated. When mistakes are made there is no redress. Organisations close ranks and protect themselves while leaving a trail of destruction.

When things go wrong, not one organisation accepts responsibility and indeed the GIRFEC guidelines muddy the waters, in terms of who is responsible for the child. Multi-agency responses should not be ambiguous in terms of who takes the lead.

Parental responsibility seems to be ignored, except when it is convenient. Parents are not supported by services but are pursued for alleged offences. Anyone can telephone social services and claim that a child is being harmed. There does not need to be any evidence for the

ensuing chaos that unfolds. Being accused of an offence regarding a child is never cleared under Scottish law unless you get to court. One cannot get to court if there is no evidence, so one cannot clear one's name. That is not justice.

I support this petition because there is no redress for when GIRFEC goes wrong. Sometimes harm is caused by the so-called "experts" that are meant to be there to help. Getting it right for every child must apply to every child. Unscrupulous professionals should not be able to break the law and then be granted anonymity because of the badge they wear.

Actions need to be evidence-based. Pursuing parents on spurious reasons amounts to a "vendetta". Taking children from their homes and moving them out of their locality serves no purpose - unless the local authority is benefitting financially?

Why are so many "looked after" children going missing? Who speaks out for them? To whom should parents speak when GIRFEC guidelines and Human Rights have been breached?

The Crown Prosecution Service still uses the term "plagium" for "child stealing". That renders it a civil offence which means that a child is considered to be less valuable than a stolen necklace.

Burying our heads in the sand and only listening to some parents, or some professionals, means that there is bias in the system and only some children are valued. Discrimination and abuse come in many forms, including not redressing the problems when GIRFEC goes wrong. A whistle-blowing service would protect all children. Currently children that are harmed by "the system" don't get any redress because it gets covered-up and there is no accountability. Victims of unlawful GIRFEC practices deserve redress and it needs political action to achieve this. The current GIRFEC guidelines contain gaps through which children are being exploited. Politicians need to listen and act so that a Rotherham-style incident is not allowed to happen in Scotland. For these reasons I support Petition PE1979.