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Ms Johann Lamont MSP
Convener
Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

— *11th* September 2019

Dear Convener

PUBLIC PETITION PE1635 ON THE CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) ACT 1995 AND CHILD CONTACT CENTRES

You may wish to be aware that the Children (Scotland) Bill has been introduced into the Scottish Parliament on 2 September 2019. The Bill is available at the link below:

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/112632.aspx>

The key policy aims of the Bill are to:

- Ensure the child's best interests are at the centre of any contact and residence case;
- Ensure that the views of the child are heard; further compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); and
- Further protect victims of domestic abuse and their children in family court proceedings.

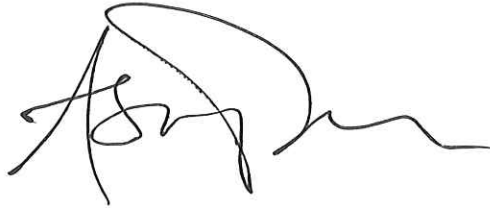
The Bill seeks to address the concerns raised by Public Petition PE1635 in relation to child contact centres. Section 9 of the Bill gives the Scottish Ministers the power to make provisions about the regulation of contact centres. This includes qualifications and training of staff and minimum standards for accommodation at contact centres. The provisions in the Bill will cover contact ordered by a court.

At the same time as the Bill was introduced I also published a Family Justice Modernisation Strategy. This sets out work that can be done through secondary legislation or by improved guidance and areas for longer term work. My officials will continue to meet with Relationships Scotland (whose member services make up the majority of contact centres in Scotland) and the three independent contact centres that we are aware of.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot



The Family Justice Modernisation Strategy is available at the link below:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/family-justice-modernisation-strategy/>



ASH DENHAM

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