

Plans to 'Criminalize' Christian Parents Foiled—For Now

A sweeping new British law, which could have criminalized parents for raising children according to their religious beliefs, will not be introduced.

Earlier this year, authoritative media reports suggested that the Serious Crime Bill would include a law carrying a maximum prison sentence of 10 years for anyone who deliberately harmed a child's "physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioral development."

Many warned that such a law would be wide open to misuse against parents for trivial matters.

Children's groups claimed it was needed to protect children, but social workers already had the power to intervene under civil law if a child was being subjected to emotional neglect.

The Christian Institute joined journalists and academics in criticizing the broad scope of such a law.

Writing in *The Times*, Libby Purves warned that even insisting on music practice or refusing computer games could be seen as "an unhealthy dismissal of a child's preferences", and that it could potentially damage "intellectual development" to bring children up in a "strict religious belief."

She highlighted comments from Alan Wood, president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, who posed: "Where do you draw the line between neglect that happens because of a lack of parental skill and that which is a criminal offense?"

And Professor Frank Furedi explained how "once the emotional

behavior of parents becomes a target for policing, every mother and father is at risk of being labeled an abuser” in a piece for *The Independent*.

In May, the Institute asked its supporters to contact their MP to raise concerns, and the proposals were not included when the Serious Crime Bill was announced in the Queen’s Speech a month later.

In June, Criminal Justice Minister Damian Green wrote to the Institute to say that the Serious Crime Bill would not criminalize parents who taught their children biblical principles.

In the end, the bill, which concluded its passage in the House of Lords last week, simply modernized the language of the existing child cruelty offense to use the term ‘psychological suffering’—without widening its remit.

Simon Calvert, spokesman for The Christian Institute, commented, “We are very pleased that the government saw sense and backed away from this dangerous parenting law.

“We all want to protect children. But if this proposal had gone through, it would have harmed children by breaking up happy families. The state could have intervened at a very low level.

“Christians in particular would have fallen foul of the law, given the growing climate of hostility to the idea of bringing children up in the Christian faith, a climate fostered by militant secularism.

“Everyone hates cruelty. But hardline atheists believe teaching children that God made the world is intellectually cruel. This sort of law would have played into the hands of those who want to marginalize Christian parents.

“The fact that the government changed its mind is a victory

for common sense. We're grateful to those who spoke out against these plans and put pressure on the government to drop them."