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11,000 Volunteers to be checked at Playcentre

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Media Release

New Zealand Playcentre Federation

10 September 2008

11,000 Volunteers to be checked at Playcentre alone

Playcentre has denounced the surprise introduction of a clause requiring police checks for volunteers working with children at early childhood centres and schools.

The Education Amendment Bill proposes police vetting of all people who have unsupervised access to children during the opening hours of early childhood centres and schools.

"Both the process for introducing the requirement and the proposal itself are deeply troubling" said Marion Pilkington, Playcentre Federation President. "For Playcentres, this would require police checks for each of the 11,000 families attending, adding an enormous compliance burden to already overloaded parent volunteers."

"What this proposal will do, is create a culture of mistrust; create a giant and costly compliance burden for every single parent-led early childhood centre in the country -- plus take thousands of volunteers away from early childhood services, playgroups and schools because people won't want the indignity and stigma of a police check, and therefore will withdraw their children or not show up," said Marion Pilkington.

"There is no demonstrated need for this damaging proposal. I understand from NZEI that of 35,000 non-teacher police vets requested between 2004-06, only seven people were identified as "sensitive" or with "red stamps". Therefore this proposal addresses a problem that doesn't even exist.

These concerns are compounded by the way that the proposal has been introduced. "Playcentre were not consulted about the process, despite the huge impact it is likely to have. So far as we know, neither have any of the other early childhood organisations," Ms Pilkington added. "With the house sitting under urgency, there doesn't appear to be any formal opportunity for the sector to comment on it."

Playcentre will be strongly opposed to the proposal and Ms Pilkington urged members of the public to express their concerns to their local MPs.

There are nearly 500 Playcentres across New Zealand, involving around 11,000 parents and providing for more than 15,000 children. Playcentres are run by parent cooperatives, and each session is supervised by trained parent teams. Playcentres operate under the early childhood curriculum, and the /Competent Children/ study rates them as providing excellent quality educational outcomes.

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