PUBLIC HEARINGS ON CHILDREN’S AMENDMENT BILL GETS UNDERWAY WITH MUCH FOCUS ON ECD CENTRES

The Portfolio Committee on Social Development kick-started public hearings virtually today on Children’s Amendment Bill where various stakeholders highlighted in their presentations to the committee, challenges relating to Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres registration, availability of sites, and challenges rural-based ECD centres encounter.

Smart Start’s Ms Rebecca Hickman said the ECD reform was a pressing matter and that her organisation agreed with moving ECD clauses to a second Amendment Bill only if there would be a clear timeline. She said: “A delay by another year will mean a quality programme is denied to thousands of children, and this window will not come around again.” She said the Act needed to enable one-step registration process and a single set of norms and standards.

Ms Tess Peacock of the Equality Collective said she supported the rejection of all the ECD clauses in the current Bill by the committee as they did not adequately address the inclusion of all the legislative reforms the country needed. “We need holistic and urgent reforms now, with strict timelines. The second Amendment Bill champion is needed so that we deal with ECD holistically. The one-step registration for ECD centres is really not hard to do and will streamline the process significantly,” she said.

Ms Peacock called for an enabling framework for ECD conditional registration, provision of support and assistance to practitioners in poor communities, and provision of infrastructure support to ECD centres in poor communities.

The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Mondli Gungubele, had earlier told participants in the public hearings that by amending legislation, the committee sought to guarantee this country its future. He said: “This will ensure that the children grow up in a viable way and that when we depart, the country is in safe hands. This Bill is at the centre of that and will ensure that children grow up properly in a conducive environment that interacts with them in a manner that enhances their growth.”

The committee had previously sought legal advice on amending ECD-related clauses. It was advised that it would be futile to amend the clauses if the function of overseeing ECD centres will move to the Committee on Basic Education, in line with the moving of the ECD centres to that portfolio. The committee resolved last week to reject the ECD clauses from the current Bill.

**By Sibongile Maputi**
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