PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF UNMARRIED FATHERS COME UP ON DAY 2 OF PUBLIC HEARINGS ON CHILDREN’S AMENDMENT BILL

Parental responsibilities of unmarried fathers and corporal punishment dominated day two’s morning session of the public hearings on the Children’s Amendment Bill that are conducted virtually by the Portfolio Committee on Social Development. Among the many stakeholders that presented, were the National House of Traditional Leaders, the Department of Basic Education, the Children’s Institute, and the Centre for the Child Law.

The National House of Traditional Leaders’ Ms Nondumiso Ngonyama said parental responsibilities of unmarried fathers should even be subject of discussion as the kids are their seeds. “All a woman provides is a carrying role, but the seed belongs to the father. We support the clause on acquiring full parental responsibilities; as long as a child is born, the father should have full parental responsibilities,” said Ms Ngonyama.

She said the requirement of partners having to live together should be done away with. Traditional leaders were critical of prescribing age limits for participation in cultural activities like circumcision, virginity testing, and the reed dance. However, Ms Ngonyama supported an end to circumcision of girls and referred to it as genital mutilation that is not practised in the country.

She said the Bill should take into consideration that in other provinces boys went to initiation schools younger than 16, and that there were no challenges. Another matter was children giving birth at a young age, which Ms Ngonyama said those are mothers and do not deserve to be regarded as children.

The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Mondli Gungubele, said sexual activity and child bearing do not accelerate into adulthood the growth of children. “The physiological stages on the growth level do not remove the responsibility of legislation to protect a child. Age relevance when dealing with human development and growth levels is important,” he said.

Mr Gungubele pointed out that a child may have given birth at an early age but such a situation does not preclude a child from protection. Ms Isabella Magaya of the Centre for Child Law said kids developed differently and that sexual entanglements or child bearing does not take away the rights of being a child. “But there is a need to have discussion on the matter.”

Other issues that came under scrutiny included alternative forms of disciplining children,

positive discipline, challenges related to when a mother has passed on or abandoned a child, capacity at children’s courts, disturbances in foster care grant payments, and DBE’s readiness to introduce the second Amendment Bill that will cater for the ECD clauses.

Mr Gungubele said no child in South Africa must lack access to benefits and foster care entitlement either due to renewal or late submission of documents, and so on.

**By Sibongile Maputi**
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