



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference
PARLIAMENTARY LIAISON OFFICE



SUBMISSION

to the

Department of Social Development

on the

Children's Amendment Bill, 2025

25 October 2025

1. The Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office (CPLO) is an office of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. It is tasked with liaising between the Church and Parliament/Government, commenting on issues of public policy, and making submissions on legislation.

2. We welcome the gazetting of the Children's Amendment Bill, 2025. The Bill addresses many of the lacuna in the Children's Act 38 of 2005, particularly the access of children to Early Childhood Development (ECD), by clarifying government roles and strengthening quality measures. It also enhances protection for children with disabilities by improving inclusion and strengthens protective measures for unaccompanied migrant children.¹

3. While welcoming these developments, we have concerns regarding the intended criminalisation of the use of 'Baby Savers' as a means of the safe relinquishment, rather than the abandonment of an infant in vulnerable conditions where they may or may not be found. In the 2024–2025 financial year, the Department of Social Development (DSD) recorded 595 cases of child abandonment. Many NGOs report that most babies found were abandoned unsafely, increasing the mortality rate. It is estimated that for every child found alive, two are discovered dead; and not all abandoned infants are found. The reasons behind child abandonment are complex, with factors such as teenage pregnancies, rape, gender-based violence, socio-economic challenges, as well as a lack of psycho-social support. The baby abandonment crisis is a tragic result of poverty, lack of resources, systemic failure and ultimately, desperation. Some mothers, after seeking help, are met only with judgement. The hidden nature of deliveries to mothers with no support system indicates that they are frightened, desperate and traumatized. All these factors contribute to crisis pregnancy, where abandonment is seen as the only option.

4. The criminalization of vulnerable mothers, where they may be liable to a fine or to imprisonment, achieves little but to compound their vulnerability. In such times of crisis we feel that a safe, non-judgemental option like Baby Savers is essential to saving the lives of

¹ Since we are commenting on only one aspect of the Bill we have not followed the suggested column format in this submission.

vulnerable infants. It is counter-productive to disband services which are having a positive impact and which have established outreach programmes. Historically and at the present time, child protection and care services are heavily dependent on the NGO sector, and this sector's experience and expertise should be taken into account when reviewing legislation. The shutting down of places of safe relinquishment would result in the closure of services and resources that have been proven to be successful, and which have saved the lives of so many infants. Mothers who make the decision to abandon an infant do so because existing services and avenues of support have failed them. Safe relinquishment provides a life affirming alternative to abandonment.

5. Baby Savers provide a safe and anonymous alternative for desperate women and girls in crisis pregnancy. A designated Child Protection Organisation is contacted, which will then take statutory responsibility for the baby and find temporary safe care for it, while assessing the best permanent placement option. There is a social work investigation to assess whether a family preservation approach would be in the best interests of the child. If these measures are not successful, the child can be made available for adoption. Baby Savers are not operating outside of the official child protection services; rather, they all go through the same legal process under the Children's Act 38 of 2005.

6. We strongly urge the revision of the proposed amendment of 'abandoned child' to clearly differentiate between unsafe abandonment, which puts a child's life at risk, and safe relinquishment through baby saver boxes or to authorised child protection services. If the legal framework outlaws Baby Savers it will lead to more, not fewer, unsafe baby abandonments, ultimately endangering more lives. Importantly, Baby Savers act as a last resort to assist desperate mothers in crisis pregnancy where other interventions were unsuccessful or unobtainable. The Department, and the law, should encourage more Baby Savers to be opened in areas where infant abandonment is at its worst. This will also allow these savers to be publicly advertised, and thus to reach more mothers in need. Child abandonment should not be the choice of last resort when there are viable alternative options.

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