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For Immediate Release

Fathers greet ‘legal right to have parents’, “But we won’t believe it ‘til we see our children”

Fathers charity Fathers Outreach has welcomed the government’s intention to confer upon children the legal right to a presumption of a relationship with both their parents - but cautions that until those rights see practical expression, the suffering of children, and families pushed out of their childrens’ lives, will continue.

Responding formally to David Norgrove’s Family Justice Review, Justice Secretary Ken Clarke and Education Secretary Michael Gove jointly issued a statement which said that *“...we should reinforce the principle through law, that it is in the best interest of the child to have a full and continuing relationship with both parents”*

“It’s a start” said Tom Jones, founder of charity Fathers Outreach. *“Most of the Dads we care for have court orders in their favour that are unenforceable, and have been pushed to edge by the family justice process – but after years of broken promises by politicians of all shades, they will believe in these proposals when they see their children, not before”*

Introducing the government’s response, ministers admit that *“when judges do hand down judgments – particularly decisions which determine how separated parents share responsibility for their children – compliance is too low and enforcement ineffective”*, and also state the intention to bring forward legislation underlining equality between mothers and fathers, irrespective of with whom their children lives.

Critically, though, no indication is given of when and how the proposals will come into law.

“They’ve identified the problem, but suffering families told us that long before Mr Norgrove’s report did” said Tom Jones. ***“Anyone who has seen the relationship with the children they love stripped from them is going to believe in these proposals only when they see their children’s faces; they are going to believe that this government cares about their suffering, only when they are free to care for their own flesh and blood”***.

Meantime, ministers have decided against awarding grandparents the automatic right to apply to the courts for contact with their grandchildren, and have fought shy of committing to routine review of cases. When a family judge makes orders regarding a child’s life, they are never appraised subsequently of the efficacy of their decisions, neither are records or statistics held on what happens to the families the system is intended to serve.

The Office for National Statistics has recently identified that one in three children, around 3.8 million, do not have a father at home. Tim Loughton, Minister for Children, stated last week that *“The state cannot create happy families, or broker amicable break-ups. But if children are having decent, loving parents pushed out of their lives, we owe it to them to change the system that lets this happen.”*

“Those fathers are out there, in our communities, suffering indescribably”, highlighted Mr Jones. *“Mr Laughton is absolutely right; I pray that he will see through his incumbency to put these protections for children into law.”*

Commenting on the treatment which fathers commonly receive, Mr Jones said *“For most of the Dads we support, the Child Support Agency recognises them as parents and demands money, but schools, doctors’ surgeries and other agencies of government refuse to accord them that same status. Until society, and the law, respects fathers, in their various guises, those men will remain on the fringes of society – and their children, and society as a whole, are the losers”*

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Notes to Editors:

- Fathers Outreach is a London-based Christian charity supporting fathers and families affected by the destructive impact of family breakdown. Founder Tom Jones is available for interview, contactable as above, and welcomes enquiries from journalists.
- The Family Justice Review, led by David Norgrove, published on 3 November 2011 and can be found here:
<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/a00200548/family-justice-review-final-report>
- The Government’s response to parliament was released today, and rejects some of the report’s key findings. It can be found here:
<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/policy/moj/family-justice-review-response.htm>