

PRESS RELEASE – S59 REVIEW PROCESS

Nigel Latta
Clinical Psychologist

I have been approached by the Prime Minister and asked if I would consider participating in a review of the Police and CYF processes around S 59 to see if the law is working as intended. I have agreed to participate in this review on the basis that it was understood that my role was independent and that I was able to speak freely about both the process of the review, and my opinions regarding its findings.

For the record, and this is something I have commented on publically in a number of contexts, my personal view on S59 is that I did not agree with the original law change. I also voted no in the referendum. I do not believe that a parent smacking their child, in the ‘common sense’ understanding of what that means, should be subject to criminal prosecution or investigation. It would be my view that the “anti-smacking debate” has become needlessly polarised from the very beginning into a position whereby you are either “for child abuse”, or you are “against child abuse”. This tendency of both sides of the debate to reduce a complex social/moral issue into rather simplistic extremes has resulted in our being plunged into an argument that has consumed a great deal of time, energy, and money, when ultimately everyone agrees with that we need to do more to protect children from abuse and neglect.

The terms of reference for this review are very clear. I see my role as first and foremost to look at the evidence and to ensure that the law does not result in good parents either being criminalised, or being needlessly subjected to investigations that are intrusive and/or traumatic. This is a responsibility I hold directly to the everyday mums and dads of New Zealand, and one that I take very seriously.

Because this issue has been dealt with to date in largely emotive and ideological rhetoric, I am interested solely in looking at the data, and in forming an opinion on the actual impact of the law change on that basis. For that reason I will not be meeting with, corresponding with, or entering into discussions with, *any* lobby groups from *either* end of the debate.

I will also not be engaging in *any* media interviews on this matter until after the review process has been completed. At that time the findings will be presented to the public in as transparent a manner as possible so that the Kiwi parents can make up their own minds based on the actual data.

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