

10 April 2007

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **CCPAS WELCOMES NEW 'MEGAN'S LAW' PROPOSAL – BUT ONLY IF THERE IS “RESPONSIBLE DISCLOSURE”**

The Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), one of the UK's leading experts in advising and training Christian and secular organisations in child protection practices, today welcomed the proposals for a US-style 'Megan's Law' in the UK - but only with important reservations.

CCPAS insists that any disclosure that takes place must at all times be specific and above all responsible. This means being especially concerned about any general disclosure of information about the whereabouts of paedophiles, as that is likely to have the detrimental and unwanted effect of sex offenders going to ground, thereby increasing insecurity of children and communities.

Simon Bass of CCPAS commented: “Losing track of serious sex offenders would be totally counter-productive and would make a mockery of the new initiative. It is therefore important that all agencies work together in assessing the risk of offenders, and robust MAPPA arrangements\* are put in place, including - where appropriate - leaders of churches and places of worship being informed and involved.”

CCPAS receives on average eight calls a week from churches and places of worship where sex offenders have joined their congregations. In response we have produced a booklet entitled *'Help ... a sex offender has joined my church'*, which gives essential practical advice to churches in this position.

CCPAS has also pioneered a scheme whereby churches safely integrate sex offenders within their fellowships. This works through devising written contracts with offenders, which outline the boundaries they are expected to stay within in order to safeguard children.

CCPAS advises that such contracts should be written with the agreement and input of the offender's probation or supervising officer. All the main Christian denominations have adopted these contracts.

Added Simon Bass: "Any proposal which will work and which will prove effective in protecting children should be welcomed, although we need to recognise that abuse by strangers is rare. Most sexual abuse occurs from people known to a child. We therefore need to educate parents better about the dangers children face from those they already know.

"Churches and places of worship play a vital role in the protection of children. We hope that addressing this issue will lead to the adoption of a uniform approach by police and probation departments – one that recognises the contribution places of worship can make to safeguarding children".

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### **Background information:**

Megan's Law was launched in the US after the rape and murder of Megan Kanka, 7, by a convicted paedophile in New Jersey. The outcry that followed, in 1994, spawned legislation that was adopted in various forms across 50 states. The law allowed public access to information on the history and whereabouts of high-risk offenders, which supporters say has been a valuable deterrent. But critics, many of whom work with sex offenders, say it induces a false sense of security for parents and can drive paedophiles underground, as well as overemphasising "stranger danger".

The campaign for a British version of Megan's Law, dubbed "Sarah's Law", was launched following the death of Sarah Payne, who was murdered by paedophile Roy Whiting in 2000, and was supported by the News of the World newspaper.

\* MAPPA - Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements - Police and Probation joint working along with other agencies in assessing the risk and supervising sexual and violent offenders in the community.

## NOTES TO EDITORS:

The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS) is an independent Christian charity providing professional child protection advice, support and training to churches, faith and other organisations throughout the UK and beyond.

Every week it is involved with:

- 30 churches/faith organisations helped in developing child protection policies
- 830 children's workers and leaders trained
- 500 contact helpline (24 hours) or email for advice
- 300 criminal records checks carried out for churches and faith groups

For more information, please see [www.ccpas.co.uk](http://www.ccpas.co.uk)