# Campaigners urge UK Government to abolish reasonable punishment defence in children’s wellbeing bill



Campaigners are advocating for amendments to the UK Government’s Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, currently under debate in Parliament, to abolish the defence of “reasonable punishment.” This legal defence permits parents to administer mild physical discipline without facing assault charges. Supporters argue that the current law has contributed to tragic outcomes, including the deaths of children such as 10-year-old Sara Sharif, whose father and stepmother were found guilty of murder in 2023, and three-year-old Dwelaniyah Robinson, whose mother was convicted of murder following his death in 2022.

Medical professionals and children’s charities are calling for a ban on smacking children, asserting that such a prohibition would protect children’s lives. A recent poll indicated substantial support for a ban among social workers, healthcare professionals, teachers, and police officers.

Professor Andrew Rowland, officer for child protection at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, explained the concerns, saying, “The evidence is clear that physical punishment of children harms their health. The laws around physical punishment as they stand are unjust and dangerously vague. They create a grey area in which some forms of physical punishment may not be unlawful.”

He added, “As a paediatrician working in child protection services, I am regularly faced with situations where it is alleged that physical punishment has been used against a child. The vague nature of the laws makes it extremely challenging to talk to families about what the rules are around physical punishment of children, thus making it more difficult to talk about the best interests of their children.”

Chris Sherwood, chief executive of the NSPCC, further stated, “Children should not be experiencing physical punishment in any form. Yet, as long as the law tolerates some level of physical force against children, their wellbeing will always be a matter of judgement about what is ‘reasonable’.”

He also highlighted professional concerns: “Professionals are telling us that the current legal loophole makes it harder for them to assess the safety of a child.”

Alongside the NSPCC, other organisations including the charity Barnardo’s and Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children’s Commissioner for England, have endorsed the call for a legal ban on physical punishment of children.

Similar bans have already been enacted in Scotland and Wales, reflecting a growing trend towards eliminating corporal punishment across the United Kingdom. A cross-party group of MPs representing Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, and Green parties proposed amendments to extend such protections to children in England through the current Bill. However, these proposals were rejected by the Department for Education.

The Express is reporting that the debate continues amid ongoing concerns over child protection laws and the legal frameworks surrounding disciplinary practices by parents.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3909/stages/19437/amendments/10018294> - This UK Parliament webpage details Amendment NC10 to the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which proposes the abolition of the common law defence of reasonable punishment in England, aligning with campaigners' advocacy for such amendments.
2. <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/equal-protection-from-assault-for-children/> - The Children's Commissioner for England's briefing supports the removal of the 'reasonable punishment' defence, emphasizing that no degree of violence against children is acceptable, thereby corroborating the call for legal reform.
3. <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/campaign-equal-protection-from-assault> - The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health's campaign highlights the negative consequences of physical punishment and advocates for the removal of the 'reasonable punishment' defence, supporting the call for legislative change.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Sara_Sharif> - The Wikipedia article on Sara Sharif's murder provides details about her death in 2023, which campaigners cite as evidence of the dangers associated with the current 'reasonable punishment' defence.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children_%28Abolition_of_Defence_of_Reasonable_Punishment%29_%28Wales%29_Act_2020> - This Wikipedia page discusses the 2020 Act in Wales that abolished the 'reasonable punishment' defence, reflecting a growing trend towards eliminating corporal punishment across the UK.
6. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10208/> - The House of Commons Library's research briefing provides an overview of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, including debates on amendments related to the abolition of the 'reasonable punishment' defence.
7. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2048272/childrens-charities-call-ban-smacking> - Please view link - unable to able to access data