

**NAGALRO PRESS RELEASE****NO CONFIDENCE IN FAMILY LAW REFORM PROPOSALS SAYS  
COMMITTEE****15 July 2009**

Nagalro today warmly welcomed the Justice Committee's reaffirmation of the vital importance of family legal aid in safeguarding the rights of children and families, and of the tandem model of social and legal support for children in court.

The Justice Committee's trenchant assessment is that recent Legal Services Commission proposals are flawed, lack a proper evidence base and show only a superficial understanding of this work. Ann Haigh, Nagalro's Chair, said: "Practitioners in the family courts will find the Committee's analysis accurately reflects their longstanding concerns."

Judith Timms, Nagalro's Policy Officer, who gave evidence to the Committee said: "We are delighted that the need for flexible provision of children's guardians and independent social workers through legal aid has been recognised as vital for the best interests of children."

"Cafcass waiting lists have grown enormously and continue to get longer. Cafcass is not in a position to meet the needs of all children and Cafcass' difficulties should not be allowed to deprive children of their rights to representation."

Ann Haigh, Nagalro Chair said: "The accelerating loss of experienced solicitors and Children's Guardians is a major tragedy for children. Practitioners are in despair at the ongoing destruction of the service that they value. We want to see the government, the Legal Services Committee and Cafcass working with legal and social work practitioners to ensure children and families receive the quality service they deserve."

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## Notes to Editors:

1. NAGALRO is the Professional Association for Children's Guardians, Family Court Advisers and Independent social work practitioners. The association aims to promote and enhance the quality of practice of those concerned with the independent representation of children's interests before the courts, throughout England and Wales.
2. Children's Guardians are appointed in public law proceedings in the family courts i.e. where Local Authority Children's Services take court action to protect children whom they believe are suffering significant harm within their families, - physical, sexual or emotional abuse. The role developed to give children a voice after the tragedy of Maria Cowell, a seven year old girl whose voice was not heard when the court returned her to mother and step father who murdered her. They are also appointed in adoption proceedings, emergency protection order, and secure accommodation applications. Family Court Advisers also act in private law cases, reporting to the court on children's welfare in relation to contact and residence issues. A Guardian can also be appointed for a child in private law proceedings under Rule 9.5 where their welfare requires independent representation.
3. The NAGALRO website can be found at: [www.nagalro.com](http://www.nagalro.com)
4. The House of Commons Justice Committee Report *Family Legal Aid Reform* Eighth Report of session 2008-9 was published on 15 July 2009 and can be found at <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmjust.htm>>