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Stewart Maxwell
Convener
Education and Culture Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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Dear Stewart,

Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill – Government announcement of Stage 2 amendments

I would like to inform you that I intend to announce on 6 January the Scottish Government's intention to submit Stage 2 amendments on 7 January to make changes to the Bill relating to the provision of aftercare and continuing care to young people.

As you are aware, during Stage 1 we have been engaged in detailed discussions with the sector, in particular with Who Cares? Scotland, Aberlour and Barnardo's regarding the provision of aftercare and the desire to provide a package of continuing care for young people to enable them to maintain relationships with their carers and ease the transition to independent living.

Scottish Ministers accept the arguments and evidence for further support to this group of young people and are mindful of the Education and Culture Committee's work in this area. The Scottish Government will therefore go as far as possible to meet the principles set out by the sector. Making the necessary changes will require significant effort on all sides, resourcing and a shift in the way we think about care on the ground. Necessarily, this will also take time.

The Committee will wish to be aware that I intend to announce our commitment to deliver a set of measures to support care leavers over the next 10 to 12 years. The amendments in this group form part of a wider package, some of which relate to Corporate Parenting and are scheduled for discussion on 7 January and the others will be considered at a future Stage 2 Committee session. Starting in April 2015, we will end a loophole that currently sees up to 40% of care leavers miss out on legal entitlements to aftercare support by virtue of the current eligibility criteria. We will move from a definition around school leaving age to a

fixed age of 16 for all young people. Over the 3 years to 2018, we expect over 800 young people a year to become eligible for aftercare than now.

I am also announcing that from April 2015, each new cohort of 16 year olds (under the above definition) will be entitled to remain in their care placement – whether kinship, foster or residential care – until the age of 21. This measure empowers young people to own their care experience and will help them in time to see care as a positive, nurturing place to be.

The Scottish Government will commit to bringing forward a right to return to care to all former care leavers until the age of 21 and we are announcing the formation of an expert group in the next few weeks to establish how and over what timescales this can be achieved safely and practically. The group will also look at how we can expand the eligibility criteria for continuing care and aftercare to a larger group. The very significant complexity of this work requires we take the necessary time to write a 'blueprint' that works, is affordable and is acceptable to the sector.

This is a worthwhile and positive package of support for some of our most vulnerable young people and it is evidence that we are doing what is necessary to get it right for children and young people in care and for care leavers.

I look forward to saying more about these measures with the Committee shortly.

AILEEN CAMPBELL