

PE1979/MM: Establish an independent inquiry and an independent national whistleblowing officer to investigate concerns about the alleged mishandling of child safeguarding enquiries by public bodies

Petitioners written submission, 6 January 2026

This latest submission from PE1979 petitioners responds to the Scottish Government's submission of 14 November and developments since October's committee.

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

Petitioners welcomed the continued cross-party support of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee when they last considered PE1979 on 8 October and their decision to request that the SG respond to the safeguarding points within our September submission.

We appreciate the committee's understanding of the serious child safeguarding concerns behind the petition and the need for an independent national whistleblowing office.

Whilst frustrated about the lack of progress, petitioners would agree with the suggestion from members, particularly Fergus Ewing MSP and Edward Mountain MSP, that our petition be kept open, and as summarised by the Convener, that "*...it might be one of our legacy petitions.*"

In our opinion, these serious child safeguarding matters should be prioritised over any administrative inconvenience for new MSPs and so that speedier progress can be embedded into the next parliament's agenda.

Scottish Government Submission

It was again with disappointment that petitioners read the SG's November submission and what is believed to be yet another defensive response and a failure to understand the safeguarding concerns well-raised in the petition's parliamentary journey.

In this submission, we would firstly continue to welcome any action which robustly improves child safeguarding and commend the work being taken forward by the many dedicated professionals.

Our focus, however, continues to be on the alleged mishandling by public bodies and what happens when something goes wrong.

It is the experience of the whistleblowers and survivors who continue to approach petitioners for support, and potentially the many others out there, that health, careers and lives are all negatively impacted by daring to allege the mishandling of child abuse concerns by public bodies. And, whilst again noting the list of improvements cited by the SG, it is felt that these are merely sticking plaster solutions.

In responding to the SG's familiar points, petitioners continue to highlight the advisory nature of the national child protection 'guidance' and the power that it places in the hands of local authorities and their multi-agency partners; the conflicts of interest that thrive at those levels and even amongst the membership of the groups listed within the submission - and indeed the civil servants drafting government answers to questions about the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry; and the time and money that would be better spent directly engaging with and empowering the voices of whistleblowers and survivors.

We also continue to highlight the limited investigation and legislative powers, as well as the complex and lengthy processes, of the existing bodies which the Scottish Government believe to be sufficient. This includes the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and Care Inspectorate – both of whom have negatively featured in petition related cases. And too, the potential of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry to identify the fullest child safeguarding truth, accountability and systematic change given its scope of care and the gaps within its own terms and references.

Petitioners note the SG's close working relationship with the GTCS as they independently implement the recommendations of the PSA Report. We have long raised the investigative weaknesses within the GTCS Fitness to Teach process and welcomed the PSA's independent recognition of these safeguarding concerns. However, we again raise that this was based on a small sample of cases provided by the GTCS and therefore continue to call for all child safeguarding referrals to be independently investigated - and ultimately by an independent national whistleblowing office.

Of particular interest within the SG submission was the Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise's July request of the Care Inspectorate to carry out an urgent review into the leadership of Children's Social Work in Edinburgh – the report of which has since been published. This was new information to petitioners and follows our writing to Edinburgh Council's Chief Executive about the alleged mishandling of past and present child abuse concerns as relates to residential care.

Sadly, whistleblowers and survivors were again dismayed to note the serious conflicts of interest at a senior level relating to this review and the terms and references limited to process rather than the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Petitioners are aware though of the wider re-investigation taking place and again sadly, concerns about conflicts of interest.

On reading the report, it felt like those raising concerns about the safety of children were being blamed for doing so and for the related publicity that led to the review. At the same time, it was not a surprise to learn that staff did not have trust and confidence in the safeguarding culture and engagement with the senior leadership. This would echo the views of whistleblowing staff – none of who were aware of or contributed to the review.

Wider Safeguarding Developments

Petitioners have watched with interest the developments around the national review of group-based child sexual abuse response, and the familiar concerns about multi-agency bodies leading on the marking of their own homework and concluding whether there should be a public inquiry.

Whilst our focus is on independent investigation of all mishandled child abuse and safeguarding concerns by public bodies and through the vehicle of an independent national whistleblowing office rather than more costly inquiries that lead to little justice and accountability, we welcomed Professor Alexis Jay as the independent chair.

We also very much welcomed Professor Jay's comments at the Education, Children and Young People's Committee on 17 December 2025. In response to a question from Miles Briggs MSP about whether she supported PE1979's call for an independent national whistleblowing office for education and children's services, her initial thoughts were "*I cannot think that it would be anything but helpful to have that, but I do not know the detail of the petition.*".

Petitioners would absolutely highlight the call as helpful... and indeed believe it to be vital.

For over 3 years now, we've shared that the mishandled allegations include and have relevance to serious and organised child sexual exploitation, with common threads across cases that require more robust and independent scrutiny to ensure the fullest child safeguarding truth and better keep children safe.

We call on the committee to support the petition's legacy and progress in the next parliament.