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To Health Professionals and
Safeguarding Children Stakeholders

20 July 2007

Dear Colleagues

**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN, SCHOOLS
AND FAMILIES (DCSF) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (DH) ON
THE DUTIES OF DOCTORS AND OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN
INVESTIGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE**

The Government has made tackling the problem of child abuse and improving safeguards for children a top priority. New legislation, guidance, structures and policy initiatives have all been introduced to make children safer and to ensure they are safeguarded from harm. Making sure this happens is everyone's responsibility.

The Government's inter-agency guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2006) sets out the key principles underpinning work to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. *Working Together* includes guidance for health professionals and paediatricians on the role they should play. They are uniquely placed to notice possible signs of abuse and it is essential that they follow up any concerns they have in line with locally established procedures. Their first duty is to the child whose safety and well being is paramount.

The Government is aware however of concerns that have been expressed by health professionals for any possible personal consequences if they are faced with legal action in connection with their professional responsibilities. These concerns are quite understandable but should not deter anyone from reporting suspected cases of child abuse provided they have acted in good faith and within their own sphere of competence.

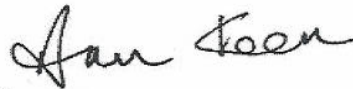
The Government recognises that in order for health professionals to do their job properly and effectively, they need to be clear about the boundaries of the professional and legal framework in which they work. The purpose of this statement is to help provide this clarity. It sets out the Government's understanding of the legal position as clarified by some helpful recent judgements. The statement outlines professionals' duty of care, the basis on which sound professional judgements should be based and their role in giving evidence and acting as expert witness.

We hope that this statement clarifies any misgivings or concern about sharing professional knowledge and advice. As stated above, safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility; we want all professionals who work or come into contact with children to be reassured about their role in the child protection process and to have the confidence to take forward and share any concerns or worries they might have.

Yours sincerely



KEVIN BRENNAN MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of
State for Children, Young People and
Families



ANN KEEN MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary for
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