

SARaH Bill - 2015 - Latest

Sunday, 04 January 2015

“It seems we still need to lobby hard to ensure the SARaH Bill reaches those parts of our society which the media and courts seem determined to undermine. Come on Parliament, support our society, its volunteers and its future! - Ian Lewis Campaign for Adventure.

New discussion in Lords supports UK society's need for this legislation. Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots speaks...

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“May we look forward to strong support from the media in ensuring the message of this legislation really does get out there!”

Full discussion - Hansard

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Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots (Con):

As I understand it, and as I understood then, the noble and learned Lord is concerned about interplay between this piece of legislation and the Compensation Act 2006. I understand his desire for legal clarity and legal purity, but I have another objective, and that is of legal connectivity.

The report that I produced for the Government, Unshackling Good Neighbours, to which he kindly referred, looked in some depth at what was inhibiting people from getting involved in society and acting as a trustee, and whether they feared potential legal consequences. We received examples in sufficient numbers, which cannot simply be dismissed as anecdotal—a term that I sometimes feel is somewhat patronising. The noble and learned Lord sought to reassure the House that, if a case came to court, the court would throw it out, would, in his phrase, “have regard for the circumstances”. With respect, he may have overlooked the effect on an individual of the agonising, expensive, lengthy and psychologically depressing process of preparing the case—this against the background that, in the event, the court may not throw the case out.

I continue, therefore, to believe that this legislation sends an important signal—there I agree with the noble and learned Lord. This signal may seem unnecessary in the cool, calm, reflective atmosphere of the Inns of Court, but it has a greater resonance at the coalface of our civil society.

At another level, I am particularly looking forward to hearing the final determination of the Opposition’s position on this issue. The noble Lord, Lord Beecham, is a witty speaker and a very practised politician. He has made some disobliging remarks about the contents of the Bill, but he has so far not moved beyond that point. I suspect that, as a practical politician, in his heart of hearts, he knows that this is an issue that, in the minds of the public, needs addressing, and which this Bill does so address.

Before I conclude, I reiterate one other point that I made in Committee. I do not argue for a single minute that the Bill is a silver bullet as regards encouraging volunteering or greater participation in our society. There is much else to be done besides. Better insurance arrangements are crucial, as is the need to debunk myths about the legal consequences of day-to-day actions, too often assiduously and repeatedly promulgated in the press. However, even if the Bill is not a silver bullet, it is a bullet, and one well worth firing. I hope that my noble friend on the Front Bench will resist the noble and learned Lord this afternoon.