

United in backing anti-child sex Bill

MPs from both sides of the divide show support for proposed law after it's finally tabled

KUALA LUMPUR: The members of Parliament are united on this one – they are saying a strong “aye!” to the proposed Sexual Offences Against Children Bill 2017.

The Bill has finally been tabled in Parliament after much campaigning for laws against child sexual grooming by *The Star's* documentary journalism team, RAGE, which had exposed sexual crimes against children in Malaysia through its “Predator In My Phone” undercover investigations (fb.com/ragepmp).

More than 20 MPs – from both sides of the divide – stood shoulder to shoulder with Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said to address newsmen at the Parliament media centre after the Bill was tabled in the Dewan Rakyat for its first reading.

“We are going in very deep with this. No more scratching the surface. I am quite excited for the MPs from both Barisan Nasional and the Opposition to raise all the issues and I believe we are open to further suggestions,” said Azalina.

“My final words to the perpetrators, you can run but you can't hide. All the MPs are very united on this issue and we don't allow any excuses,” she said.

To date, *The Star* has secured



Strong backing: The MPs pledging their support for the Sexual Offences Against Children Bill 2017.

pledges from 115 MPs who support the Bill, effectively ensuring the majority needed to pass the Bill. There are 222 MPs in the Dewan Rakyat.

Azalina urged the remaining MPs to vote in favour of the Bill, saying those who don't must be “perverts”.

The proposed Bill, Azalina said, was thorough and covered all

important elements to safeguard a child.

“One of the most relevant facts of this Bill is the element on sexual assault, whether physical or non-physical. This means we are also going after harassment,” she added.

Anyone who withholds information on an offence that they know of

can also be charged and fined.

Azalina was also optimistic that the Bill would help expedite prosecution.

“Cases will be settled very fast. There will be no postponement for years until the child forgets.”

Azalina said some sections of the Penal Code would be amended with the Bill simultaneously on April 3.

“The Bill won't go on its own. The Penal Code will be amended to go along with it,” she added.

Lembah Pantai MP Nurul Izzah Anwar, who was at the press conference, called on all stakeholders to unite in ensuring that offenders are brought to justice.

“This is an important and fundamental issue. We have to protect our children,” she said.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim said the Bill contained provisions that were previously not covered under the Child Act.

“The Child Act was more about protecting the child but perpetrators would escape. We welcome the Bill as it covers a more extensive ground,” she said.

Others present included Senator Datin Paduka Chew Mei Fun, Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Dr Mary Yap, Seputeh MP Teresa Kok, Kuala Selangor MP Datuk Irmohizam Ibrahim, MCA Wanita chief Datuk Heng Seal Kie and Batu Kawan MP Kasthuriraani Patto.

Watch the video
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