

Hannah Yeoh calls on new PM to urgently establish a ministry for children

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 22 — Segambut MP Hannah Yeoh has called for new Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob to create a new ministry specifically to look after the needs of the children in the country as soon as possible.

The DAP lawmaker said Ismail needs to establish a Ministry of Children as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has exposed and amplified the weaknesses of Malaysia's system to adequately protect children.

"The wellbeing of our children is under severe threat during this prolonged lockdown. If so many meetings can be called to jostle for positions amongst the prospective Ministers, surely our children deserve their attention.

"If the Perikatan Nasional government then could pacify 32 ministers and 38 deputy ministers with a portfolio each, it would not be impossible for Ismail Sabri to fulfil the immediate need for the formation of a Ministry of Children," she said in a statement.

She shared some data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia 2020, which states the population of children is about 30 per cent in most states, with Wilayah Persekutuan coming top at 38.5 per cent.

"This is a sizeable group and they are indeed our future and our greatest asset. This pandemic has exposed and amplified the weaknesses of our country's system to adequately protect children.

"Food baskets provided by the Government did not include milk for infants and toddlers. After more than a year of battling Covid, the Perikatan Nasional government woke up to the need of identifying children who were made orphans by Covid," she said.

Yeoh also shared that during her time as the deputy minister of Women, Family and Community Development when Pakatan Harapan (PH) was in power, they focused heavily on issues relating to children because of their vulnerability.

"Prior to the Covid-era, children in Malaysia were already facing many challenges and violations. Child abuse, sexual acts against children and neglect are common forms of violation to children in Malaysia.

"We appointed the first Children's Commissioner, launched the first child sex offenders registry, provided millions in grant to establish childcare in the workplace for our civil service, launched infographics for childcare providers and parents, partnered with Google to bring awareness videos on bad touch vs good touch for young children, provided WhatsApp services for Talian Kasih to make it more accessible and so many other ways to improve children safety," she said.

She said that they had then launched a study on creating an agency specifically for children, and were also working on increasing the number of child protectors available in the country.

“Currently, a child protector takes up 80 children’s cases leaving them insufficient time for follow-ups. The actual ratio of protector and children is 1:45,142 and this is simply impossible for protection of children to be effective,” she said.

She added that preliminary meetings were also held to restructure early childhood education and care (ECCE), recommendations for the Home Ministry to simplify citizenship procedures for children involving Malaysian mothers, adoption process, foster care and data sharing with police.

“It is time the new Prime Minister of Malaysia prioritises our children above special envoy and advisor positions with Minister status.

“If it could be done then for Hadi Awang and Faizal Azumu, it can and must be done now for our children. Our children are far more worthy of taxpayers’ money!” she said.

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