

Public Health Amendment Statute 1883, Victoria

1883 – 1890

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Details

The Public Health Amendment Statute 1883, No. 782, also referred to as the Public Health Amendment Act, made local boards responsible for overseeing the registration of children placed in the homes of people other than their families. This was Victoria's first attempt to legally regulate the practice referred to as baby-farming.

In the mid-nineteenth century it was common for poor women, particularly single mothers, to place their young children with other women who cared for the children in return for a regular fee. As public concern about the treatment of children living under these arrangements increased, this practice became known as 'baby farming'. In 1872 laws regulating 'baby farming' were introduced in England, and in response the Central Board for Health recommended that a similar measure be established in Victoria.

There was no immediate legislative response. In 1877, under the auspices of Lady Bowen (wife of the then Governor of Victoria), a group of women established the Victorian Infant Asylum. One of the goals of this organisation was to prevent infants from being placed with 'baby farmers'.

In 1883 the Public Health Amendment Act gave local Boards of Health the responsibility of determining which premises and persons were fit to provide care for children under two years of age who were not living with their parents, and for examining the register of children living in and passing through registered homes. The police acted as the boards' inspectors and reported violations of the Act. It was amended by Act No. 1011 and Act No. 1044. It was repealed by the Health Act 1890, No. 1098, on 1 August 1890.

The Infant Life Protection Act 1890 transferred the supervision of the measures established by the 1883 Act to the police. The Infant Life Protection Act 1907 extended the definition of infants to include all children under five years of age and also transferred the administration of infant life protection measures to the Neglected Children's Department. The Infant Life Protection Act 1915 was a re-enactment of the 1907 provisions, and was consolidated in the Children's Welfare Act 1928.

More info

Chronology

- **Public Health Amendment Statute 1883, Victoria (1883 – 1890)**
 - The Public Health Act 1889, Victoria (1890)

Related Entries

Related Organisations

- [The Victorian Infant Asylum \(1877 - 1902\)](#)

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