

# Infant Life Protection Act 1907, Tasmania

1907 – 1920

URL: [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/num\\_act/tilpa19077evn51355/](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/num_act/tilpa19077evn51355/)

## Details

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The Infant Life Protection Act 1907 also known by its full title as 'An Act to make Better Provision for the Protection of Infant Life, and for other purposes' (Act no.7 Edw. VII No.51) was intended to reduce the high mortality rate of illegitimate babies by providing for the inspection of their foster homes. This act was repealed and replaced by The Maintenance Act 1919 (Act no. 10 Geo.V no.62) in 1920.

In order to support themselves by working, many single mothers had to place their babies in foster homes. Without their mothers to breastfeed them, and with foster mothers who were often poor and living in substandard housing, many of these babies died. These foster mothers were probably poor women trying to survive but a media scare in 1905 depicting them as baby farmers gave them a bad name and contributed to the passage of the Tasmanian Infant Life Protection Act 1907.

The Children's Protection Society campaigned for the Act with the support of JSC Elkington, the Chief Health Officer.

The Infant Life Protection Act replaced clauses in the Public Health Act 1903 (Act no. 3 Edw.VII No.37) which were intended to protect babies but were never implemented by the local authorities who were supposed to administer them. The new Act took responsibility from them and placed it with the Police Department.

Under Part II of the Act, households taking in infants were registered and known as Nursing Homes. Women who had the care of an infant, not their own, for more than twenty-four hours had to register with the Police Department. Inspections of their homes were to take place regularly, carried out by nurses from the Police Department. The Police Commissioner could cancel the registration of inadequate carers. Infant deaths had to be reported within twenty-four hours.

The management of children's nursing homes passed from the Police Department to the Children of the State Department in 1918.

The Act also provided for the collection of maintenance from fathers but there had to be some evidence of paternity other than the mother's oath. Parents who did not comply with maintenance orders could be fined or, if they left the state, imprisoned.

## More info

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### Chronology

- **Infant Life Protection Act 1907, Tasmania (1907 – 1920)**
  - The Maintenance Act 1919, Tasmania (1920 - 1922)
    - The Maintenance Act 1921, Tasmania (1922 - 1968)
      - The Maintenance Act 1967, Tasmania (1967 - current)

## Related Entries

### Related Glossary Terms

- [Baby Farming \(c. 1867 - c. 1910\)](#)
- [Infant Life Protection \(1890s - 1960s\)](#)

The Infant Life Protection Act 1907 was Tasmania's first infant life protection legislation.

### Related Organisations

- [Glen Dhu Babies' Home \(c. 1905 - 1911\)](#)
- [Children's Protection Society \(1903 - 1920?\)](#)

The members of the Children's Protection Society campaigned for the Infant Life Protection Act 1907.

### Amends

- [The Public Health Act 1903, Tasmania \(1904 - 1935\)](#)

Infant life protection measures in the Public Health Act 1903 preceded those of the Infant Life Protection Act 1907.

### Related Archival Series

- [Correspondence Relating to Children Placed in Nursing Homes \(1934 - 1953\)](#)

## Resources

- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), [To Remove and Protect](#), 2014

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