

# The Wanderer

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## In U.K., "Big Brother" To Monitor Family Life

(Special to *The Wanderer*)

LONDON — Within two years, "Big Brother" in England will be monitoring the family lives in most of England's homes, in a broad new total surveillance system aimed at rooting out "child abuse."

Authorized by the Children's Act of 2004, passed by Parliament in the wake of the physical abuse and murder of eight-year-old Victoria Climbié by her aunt and her boyfriend, the nearly \$500 million database will monitor 12 million children in England and Wales, even going so far, reported the *London Telegraph* June 26 to see "whether they eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. . . ."

"Experts say it is the biggest state intrusion in history into the role of parents," reported the *Telegraph's* Sarah Womack.

"The government expects the program to be operating within two years.

"But critics say the electronic files will undermine family privacy and destroy the confidentiality of medical, social work, and legal records."

Climbié was beaten to death by her aunt and her friend, who claimed the little black girl from the Ivory Coast was possessed by the devil. At the time, however, it was her social workers and their superiors at social services who were blamed. One of the girl's social workers testified that she was afraid of catching scabies if she entered her flat; superiors said they did not have enough employees to handle their case loads.

In the surveillance system, doctors, teachers, and police will inform the database on a wide range

of health issues. Two warnings will prompt an investigation.

"There will also be a system of targets and performance indicators for children's development," reported Womack.

"Children's services have been told to work together to make sure that targets are met. Childcare academics, practitioners and policy experts attending a conference at the London School of Economics will express concern about how the system will work.

"Dr. Eileen Munro, of the LSE, said that if a child caused concern by failing to make progress towards state targets, detailed information would be gathered. That would include subjective judgments such as 'Is the parent providing a positive role model?' as well as sensitive information such as a parent's mental health.

"They include consuming five portions of fruit and veggies a day, which I am baffled how they will measure," she said. "The country is moving from 'parents are free to bring children up as they think best as long as they are not abusive or neglectful' to a more coercive 'parents must bring children up to conform to the state's views of what is best' . . . ."

"Experts fear that genuine cases of neglect will be missed in the mass of detail," reported Womack.

"When you are looking for a needle in a haystack, is it necessary to keep building bigger haystacks?" said Jonathan Bamford, the assistant commissioner at the Information Commissioner's office, which promotes access to official information and the protection of personal information. . . ."