

**NATIONAL
CHILD ABUSE
COALITION**

1000 Vermont Ave., NW * Suite 700 * Washington * DC 20005

Phone 202-347-3666 * Email bircht@earthlink.net * Fax 202-289-0776

September 24, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As members and affiliates of the National Child Abuse Coalition committed to strengthening the federal response to the protection of children and the prevention of child abuse and neglect, we want to express our appreciation and thanks to you for your leadership in allocating an additional \$10 million in funding in the Fiscal 2011 appropriations for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to support discretionary funds authorized by Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA).

The new funding would be designated, as proposed in President Obama's 2011 budget, for "a new competitive grant program to support States' implementation and increased use of evidenced-based child maltreatment prevention programs and activities." We urge you and your colleagues to maintain this new funding in the final appropriations measure for 2011.

According to the report of the Senate Appropriations Committee accompanying the FY11 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill, this new grant program would focus on families with very young children who are at the greatest risk of child maltreatment, and will include "evidence-based prevention strategies to promote parental resilience, knowledge of parenting and child development, nurturing and attachment, concrete support, and social connections."

The future prosperity of our country depends on our ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. Innovative programs that bolster these "protective factors", when they are robust in a family, have proven through evidence-based findings to diminish the likelihood of child abuse and neglect among families who have received the program's benefits and increase the potential for the child's optimal development.

Research shows that programs focused on building these factors can reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect by enhancing a parent's ability to provide their children with the opportunity for healthy growth and development, even when the parent experiences highly stressful situations. What's more, this "protective factors" approach based on building on family strengths has been shown to foster enhanced collaboration among early childhood, child abuse prevention, and child protective services sectors, leading to a more comprehensive approach to preventing child maltreatment.

Investing in evidence-based strategies that strengthen protective factors is cost-effective, saving money in the long-term. There are many examples of individual programs using research behind a protective factors framework for their work. For example, an analysis by the Partnerships in Prevention Science Institute at Iowa State University found that an Iowa Strengthening Families

Program, an evidence-based program based on the protective factors, to have a return of \$9.60 for every dollar spent implementing the protective factors framework.

The Iowa Strengthening Families Program was originally developed employing these protective factors for parents with substance use disorders and their children – a population at particular risk for neglect or abuse. The children of parents who abuse alcohol and other drugs are nearly three times as likely to be abused, and they are more than four times as likely to be neglected, than other children. The program has since shown itself to be effective and used widely with non-substance abusing parents in many settings: schools, churches, mental health centers, public housing, homeless shelters, recreation centers, family centers, and drug courts. Encouraging many different kinds of programs to join in the effort will create many more opportunities for families to build protective factors that lead to significantly better results for their children.

Protective factors aimed at improving family relationships by addressing family conflicts and family cohesion have shown positive outcomes with increased family strengths and resilience, including families at risk of family violence. Research indicates that child maltreatment and family violence co-occur in 30 to 60 percent of families among which either is present. Promoting healthy family relationships between parents as well serves to protect children in preventing the risk of child abuse that can co-occur with intimate partner violence.

Additional funding to help states protect children and support families and to evaluate the effectiveness of this new approach is critical. As the U.S. economy has worsened, increases in reports of child maltreatment have been linked to the weakened state of the economy. The National Research Council has identified unemployment among the stresses associated with child maltreatment in families. Research has shown us that child maltreatment rates are higher in areas with unusually high rates of unemployment. In times of crisis, families need additional supports and services to prevent maltreatment from occurring.

We are grateful to you for your commitment to ensuring that children at risk of abuse or neglect and their families receive the services necessary for their healthy development, and we appreciate your leadership to promote these increased funding levels in CAPTA for programs to protect children and to prevent child abuse and neglect. Thank you for your attention to our request. If you would like additional information, please contact Tom Birch, legislative counsel for the National Child Abuse Coalition, at 202-347-3666 or bircht@earthlink.net.

Sincerely,
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Humane Association
American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Center for Children and Family Futures
Center for Law and Social Policy
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Advocacy Institute
Children's Defense Fund
Every Child Matters Education Fund
Foster Family-based Treatment Association
National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds
National Association of Counsel for Children
National Coalition to End Child Abuse Deaths
National Exchange Club Foundation
Prevent Child Abuse America
Voices for America's Children
Youth Villages

cc: Members, Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations