



National Association of Public
Child Welfare Administrators

an affiliate of the American Public Human Services Association

**Written Statement of the
National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators**

Hearing on Preventing Child Abuse and Improving Responses to Families in Crisis

**Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities
Education and Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives**

On behalf of the American Public Human Services Association and its affiliate, the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, we applaud the committee's interest in preventing child maltreatment and improving responses to families in crisis. We respectfully submit the following for your consideration.

APHSA is a nonprofit, bipartisan organization representing state and local human service professionals for more than 79 years. NAPCWA, created as an affiliate in 1983, works to enhance and improve public policy and administration of services for children, youth and families. As the only organization solely devoted to representing administrators of state and local public child welfare agencies, NAPCWA brings an informed view of the problems today's at-risk children and families face.

More Resources Needed for Prevention and Protection

NAPCWA represents state public child welfare administrators implementing child safety and protection programs. Our members depend on a patchwork of federal funding streams, including CAPTA, to meet families' needs. However, most prevention and protection services are supported by state and local dollars. Child protection and safety services include, but are not limited to, child abuse and neglect hotlines and investigations, family intervention, differential response, parent training, mentoring and coaching, and residential substance abuse treatment centers, among others. Each public child welfare agency works to reduce child abuse and neglect by supporting and responding to families either not known to the system (primary prevention); families known, but with no open case (secondary prevention) and families already part of the system (tertiary prevention).

Federal resources for prevention and protection are scarce and support children placed in out-of-home settings such as foster care and adoption. Ninety percent of all federal dollars are used for foster care and adoption, while only the remaining 10 percent supports prevention.¹ This imbalance indicates the need for a stronger federal role in providing resources for preventing and treating child abuse and neglect, including an increase in funding for CAPTA.

Child Welfare's Role

Difficult economic times impact at-risk children and families the most. Child welfare has witnessed first-hand how the economic downturn negatively affects the entire family unit. Families struggle with job security, mental and physical health as well as substance abuse issues. States and localities are amplifying their efforts to expand child protection programs and focus on better serving these vulnerable populations.

In addition to supporting parents and other caregivers, the state child welfare agency's primary responsibility is the safety, permanency and well-being of children. Through referrals from the child abuse hotlines as well as tips from mandated reporters such as teachers, physicians and nurses, child protection workers investigate and assess family situations and determine the child's imminent risk of serious harm. It is the role of child welfare professionals to balance the rights, roles and responsibilities of parents and the safety and well-being of children.

Public agencies cannot ensure child safety alone. Therefore, child welfare agencies collaborate with communities, nonprofit and private agencies, and faith-based organizations to help support children and families. Together, they provide a wide array of prevention and protection activities such as public awareness campaigns, skills-based courses, parent education and support groups, home visitation, family resource centers and respite and crisis care programs.

State, local, federal and private resources help sustain these programs to better serve children and families involved or at-risk of becoming involved in the child welfare system. Below are best practices and promising innovations states are using to keep families stable and healthy, especially during difficult financial times.

Engaging Community Partners to Reduce Child Maltreatment

Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services partnered with local community-based organizations to establish the Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project.² The partnership between the DCFS and community-based organizations extends beyond traditional parameters and contractual agreements. It builds a unique relationship between committed entities to help strengthen families during times of crisis. In 2003, the DCFS established agency-wide goals to reduce reliance on foster care, and support children and families at home. These partnerships were essential to expedite this mission. Through the county's IV-E waiver, the PIDP receives \$5 million a year to serve low-income, at-risk families. The PIDP is known for its work using parent advocates, cultural brokers and family visitation centers to assist families in need.

The PIDP's basic principles to reduce child abuse and neglect include increasing families' accessibility to adequate resources and support; creating economically stable environments for families to raise children in their own homes; and developing integrative activities and resources to improve communities and build healthier families. Los Angeles County's effort to engage private, public and nonprofit organizations to collaboratively serve a common purpose is one example of how states and localities are expanding their resources to prevent child maltreatment.

Enhancing Child Protective Services by Implementing Differential Response Models

Minnesota established differential response to transform its approach to address child maltreatment reports by implementing a strength-based, community-focused mechanism to effectively improve child safety and well-being.³ This approach serves to identify families' needs so children can safely remain in their homes.

Due to increased child maltreatment reports, Minnesota launched a four-year differential response pilot project in 20 counties from 2000 to 2004. The pilot began in Olmstead County and provided family assessments and parent support intervention services to families determined to be at-risk. The Institute of Applied Research conducted a rigorous field study on the effectiveness of this pilot program using control groups, participant interviews and a review of administrative data. The findings show that child safety was uncompromised; there were fewer child maltreatment reports and minimal uses of costly approaches; and families and social workers supported the model. Many states are using similar models to reduce child protection reports by providing early intervention.

Investing in Local Evidence-Based Initiatives to Enhance Child Welfare Prevention and Child-Well Being

Ohio widely invests in evidence-based, multi-pronged initiatives serving vulnerable children and families.⁴ The state has launched various countywide child welfare reform efforts focusing on front-end services to increase support for families in need. One of these efforts includes the Ohio Children's Trust Fund, which supports local and statewide prevention services to help empower families using positive family engagement activities and promote an alternative response to child maltreatment reports. The Incredible Years is an exemplary evidence-based model that provides parent, teacher and child social skills training and has proven to be effective in Ohio's counties. This community-based model seeks to develop comprehensive treatment programs for young children with early onset behavioral issues and works to prevent juvenile delinquency, drug abuse and violence. The program has been rigorously tested using randomized control evaluations and produced evidence of high ratings and effectiveness. Local, federal and state dollars assist the program's sustainability during tough economic times.

Another protection and prevention aspect in Ohio is the Darkness to Light program. This outcome-based program provides sexual abuse prevention and intervention services to vulnerable communities. The program raises awareness about preventing child sexual abuse by educating adults about the prevalence and consequences of child victimization. Darkness to Light offers online support group services that focus on aiding current and past child abuse and domestic violence victims. Outreach efforts include a sexual abuse hotline to serve victims and media campaign to spread awareness. These local innovations offer universal preventive approaches offering cost-effective, multi-layered strategies to improve child well-being.

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect Through Home Visitation Models

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services operates a research-based, comprehensive home visitation model serving more than 20,000 low-income families since 1995.⁵ Healthy Families New York is dedicated to provide child abuse and prevention services to expectant parents and parents with infants from zero to three months of age. These children and families are considered to be at-risk of abuse or neglect and live in vulnerable communities with high poverty rates, infant mortality and teen pregnancy. The HFNY's home visitors provide families with support, education and linkages to community services designed to address the following needs: (1) to prevent child abuse and neglect; (2) to enhance parenting skills and parent-child interactions; (3) to ensure optimal prenatal care and child health and development; and (4) to increase parents' self-sufficiency.

The HFNY is rigorously evaluated and shows positive outcomes in childbirth, child abuse and neglect, parenting practices and access to health care. This nationally acclaimed program was featured in a January 2009 issue of *The American Journal of Preventive Medicine* showing that all mothers enrolled in the HFNY before their 31st week of pregnancy were half as likely to have low-birth weight babies compared to mothers in an unassigned control group. Another study published in the March 2008 issue of *Child Abuse and Neglect* indicates that the HFNY has seen a decrease in incidences of abuse and neglect during children's first two years of life and reduced use of aggressive parenting practices particularly involving first-time teen mothers. The OCFS's home visitation model has proven to be successful in low-income communities. New York is one state out of many that operate these programs.

NAPCWA Guidance on Prevention & Protection

NAPCWA recently released national child safety guidance known as *Framework for Safety in Child Welfare*.⁶ This manual provides tools for states to define, assess and respond effectively to child abuse and neglect. We believe that this guidance will assist states in reducing the likelihood of child fatalities and instances of child maltreatment. Child safety is paramount from the time children come to the attention of state child protection agencies through case closure. However, everyone is responsible for ensuring children's safety, regardless if they are employed by the public or private sector.

Public child welfare agencies work diligently to ensure the safety and well-being of children and families. These agencies respond to more than a million reports of abuse and neglect each year. However, there are minimal federal resources to support child protection and prevention programs. Therefore, we encourage Congress to increase CAPTA funding and restructure the child welfare financing system to better support children and families. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to child safety and family preservation.

Contact Information

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¹ Pew Charitable Trusts. *Time for Reform: Investing in Prevention: Keeping Children Safe At Home*. 2007.

² *Stories of Prevention in Los Angeles County: DCFS and Community Agencies Join Hands to Support Families and Children*. Casey Family Programs. July 2009.

³ Olmstead County Department of Child and Family Services' Testimony for House Education and Labor Hearing entitled "Preventing Child Abuse and Improving Responses to Families in Crisis." Robert Quinn Sawyer, MSW, LICSW. November 5, 2009.

⁴ Public Children Services Association of Ohio. *The Child Protection Mission: Safe Children, Stable Families, & Strong Communities*. 9th Edition 2009 – 2010.

⁵ New York Office of Children and Family Services. *Healthy Families New York*. 2009.

⁶ *Framework for Safety in Child Welfare*. American Public Human Services Association. 2009.