May 8, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
United States Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader McConnell:

Together, as state, tribal, and local organizations whose mission is to ensure the well-being of children, families, and communities, we write to urge Congress to include immediate emergency funding to support families and keep children safe from child abuse and neglect in the form of $1 billion Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CB-CAP) grants, as well as consider a reauthorization of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in the upcoming “Phase 4” COVID-19 stimulus package.

As you well know, our nation’s child welfare system already faced an enormous challenge brought about by the spike in child abuse, neglect and out-of-home placements attributed to the opioid epidemic. The stress and disruptions placed on families as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded these challenges exponentially for the agencies and entities that provide critical support to our communities. And while we continue to work diligently to administer vital child welfare prevention and intervention services during these extraordinary times, we are confronting major obstacles to effective service delivery.

Providing an immediate increase in funding to CAPTA Title II CB-CAP grants through an emergency appropriation would ensure the ability to quickly deploy resources directly to locally-driven prevention services and programs. This funding would be used to meet the need for child abuse prevention programs and adapt services to account for social distancing in all 50 states and will target specific services to locations where it is most needed.

In addition to a critically important $1 billion emergency appropriation for CB-CAP grants to address immediate needs, the effects of this pandemic will impact families and communities for years to come. CAPTA is foundational to our child protection system and includes important provisions that help keep children safe from maltreatment, treat the effects of abuse when it happens, and strengthen families and communities during normal times. This legislation was necessary before families were faced with navigating new public health safety protocols, school closures, uncertain childcare arrangements, job losses, social isolation, and significant barriers to many critical support services. Now, in these extraordinary times, its reauthorization and full funding is absolutely critical.
The unprecedented combination of economic stress coupled with social isolation that has become the “new normal” is a perfect storm for increasing the risk of child abuse and neglect. This is occurring at the same time that family supports and child welfare responses are challenged by the public health crisis. Although reporting is likely to decrease as children are isolated from others, we expect that abuse and maltreatment cases will rise significantly in the coming months if nothing is done to provide the types of programs that are proven to prevent abuse and neglect. As a point of comparison, the 2008 recession saw a decline in maltreatment overall figures but a rise in serious maltreatment related hospital visits with a correlation to areas hit hardest by unemployment and foreclosure. We have already begun to see an increase in child maltreatment related hospitalizations. Notwithstanding the immediate impact of child abuse and neglect, children may also see long-term effects on their health and well-being if not addressed. These effects may manifest in substance abuse, delayed brain development, lower educational attainment, and limited employment opportunities. As you know, the cumulative cost of child maltreatment is significant. By not focusing on prevention during this crucial time, avoidable abuse and neglect of children will occur, the child welfare system will become even more overwhelmed, and taxpayers will ultimately take the burden of the resultant cost. CAPTA is the only federal legislation providing population-level primary prevention capacity building, so its reauthorization at an appropriate funding level is essential, now more than ever.

We thank you for your time and attention to this matter and once again strongly urge you to include a $1 billion increase in emergency funding for CB-CAP grants to address immediate unmet need in states around the country, as well as provide certainty of a more long-term commitment to preventing child abuse and neglect by reauthorizing CAPTA in Congress’ next round of stimulus legislation.

Sincerely,

Brad Thomas
Chief Executive Officer
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cc: Honorable Chuck Schumer, Senate Democratic Leader
    Honorable Kevin McCarthy, House Republican Leader

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