

# NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE COALITION

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December 19, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Room H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John A. Boehner, Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Room 1011, Longworth H.O.B.  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David R. Obey, Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Room H218, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Room 1016, Longworth H.O.B.  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Boehner, Chairman Obey, and Ranking Member Lewis:

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 urge your support to include in the economic stimulus package increased funds applied to the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Title II Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grants. During times of economic hardship and unemployment, child abuse and neglect rates often rise. Additional funds for these programs would assist states in handling greater numbers of cases of child abuse and neglect and in providing supportive services to parents and families experiencing the stresses of unemployment and economic hardship.

We ask your support to include in the economic stimulus package financial assistance to states and communities with high levels of unemployment to meet increased demands for child protective services and preventive services to support parents, recognizing the importance of protecting vulnerable children from abuse and neglect and supporting parents in time of economic distress.

1. **Increase funding for the Social Services Block Grant.** An additional \$1 billion for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), targeted for support of child welfare services, would assist states with significant numbers of unemployed persons in handling greater numbers of cases of child abuse and neglect. These additional SSBG funds would enable states to address infrastructure and staffing needs in child welfare services as well as to provide support directly for a range of additional services that families need in times of crisis. The flexibility of SSBG is one of its strengths for responding to the crisis.

The child protection system, already stretched beyond capacity, requires special attention in times of increased economic hardships with increased demands for services. Even now, the average caseload for child welfare workers is double the recommended level, and obviously much higher in many jurisdictions. We should not fail our children and America's families by failing to invest in a responsive, working child protection system. The SSBG funding would enable state child protective services to expand post-investigative services for child victims, shorten the time to the delivery of services, and increase services to at-risk families.

2. **Increase funding for the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grants.** An additional \$100 million for the prevention grants authorized under Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) would help states support the community-based child abuse prevention programs offering the supportive services needed by parents and families feeling the stresses of unemployment and economic hardship. Communities across the country have developed preventive services which show

success in programs for new parents, home visitor services, respite and crisis care, parent mutual support, and family support services. These community-based organizations play a critical role in delivering prevention services, but their budgets—often based on charitable donations—are likely to suffer during difficult economic times.

These provisions in the emergency stimulus package would enable states to distribute assistance efficiently and quickly through the already established funding mechanisms of the CAPTA Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grants and the Social Services Block Grants for protecting vulnerable children from abuse and neglect and supporting parents in time of economic hardship.

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. Increases in child abuse and neglect are often preceded by periods of high job loss. In times of crisis, families need additional supports and services to prevent maltreatment from occurring.

Most children in the child welfare system are from low-income families for reasons which include parental stress during financial difficulties which contributes to child abuse, and poor families reported for neglect that do not have adequate resources to care for their children. According to the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect, children from families with incomes below \$15,000 per year are more than 22 times more likely to experience abuse or neglect than children living in families with incomes of \$30,000 or more. While most poor people do not maltreat their children, poverty – particularly when interacting with other risk factors, including unemployment – increases the likelihood of maltreatment. Particularly in cases of neglect, poverty and unemployment show strong associations with child maltreatment.

Thank you for your continuing support of programs to protect children and to prevent child abuse and neglect. We hope we can count on your leadership to promote these increased funding levels for the CAPTA community-based prevention grants and the Social Services Block Grants. We greatly appreciate your commitment to ensuring that vulnerable families and children at risk of abuse or neglect receive support as part of the economic stimulus package, and we thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
 American Academy of Pediatrics  
 American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)  
 American Humane Association  
 American Psychological Association  
 Center for Law and Social Policy  
 Child Abuse Council (Moline, Illinois)  
 Child Welfare League of America  
 Children's Action Alliance (Arizona)  
 Children's Defense Fund  
 Children's Health Care Is a Legal Duty  
 Children's Law Center (Washington, DC)  
 Children's Law Center of Los Angeles  
 City of New York Administration for Children's Services  
 Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families  
 First Focus  
 First Star  
 Foster Family-based Treatment Association  
 GrandFamilies of America  
 John Burton Foundation (California)  
 National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds  
 National Association of County Human Services Administrators

National Association of Social Workers  
National Foster Care Coalition  
National Network to End Domestic Violence  
National Respite Coalition  
North American Council on Adoptable Children  
Parents Anonymous  
Prevent Child Abuse America  
Solutions for Children and Caregivers of Maryland  
Stop It Now!  
Voices for America's Children  
Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund