



December 12, 2019

Chairman Lamar Alexander
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Patty Murray
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Johnny Isakson
131 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Doug Jones
330 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Senator Isakson, & Senator Jones:

The National Child Abuse Coalition thanks you for your attention to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) this year. CAPTA plays a vital role in state and local efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect and to intervene to mitigate harm to children. There is an urgent need for CAPTA reauthorization, and we appreciate the steps you are taking today in the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. It is very important to recognize that the improvements in this bill will not be achieved unless CAPTA receives more robust funding. We look forward to working with you during the annual appropriations process and during the negotiations around the drug pricing bill to ensure Congress makes a down payment on the reforms they are hoping to achieve in CAPTA reauthorization.

The National Child Abuse Coalition, a collection of over twenty-five national organizations committed to the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect, believes CAPTA must take a public health approach to addressing child abuse and neglect, starting with primary prevention strategies that are at the heart of Title II and extending into the identification and treatment of abuse and neglect addressed in Title I. We envision an overhaul of CAPTA that supports a system that empowers families and communities and gives them the tools and resources to provide healthy, safe homes for their children whenever possible so that the foster care is a system of last resort. As noted by Associate Commissioner of the Children's Bureau at HHS, Jerry Milner, "Tweaking what we have in place won't solve the problems....we need to change the focus of child welfare to primary prevention of maltreatment and unnecessary removal of children from their families. We can only break the cycle of family disruption and maltreatment by addressing the root causes of those situations." The reauthorization of CAPTA provides Congress a prime opportunity to do just that.

The Coalition believes S. 2971, the *CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2019*, includes some important provisions. In particular, we support the bill's provisions that place a heavier emphasis on primary prevention, improve disclosure in instances of child abuse and neglect

fatalities and near fatalities, emphasize the need for rapid response for reports involving children under age three, recognize the need to continue our national response to infants with prenatal substance exposure through plans of safe care, strengthen the focus of the Secretary's discretionary activities, and recognize the importance of training for mandated reporters, particularly for leaders within organizations.

As the reauthorization process continues after the Committee mark up, we look forward to working with you to further strengthen the bill, including by –

- ensuring the authorization levels included in this legislation and the funding levels in the appropriations process reflect the urgent need to make children safer and families stronger;
- improving the accountability and transparency in Title I so decades of important CAPTA Congressional reforms can finally move forward;
- emphasizing the evidence-base for family-strengthening services; and
- simplifying the Title II funding formula.

In addition, we note the importance of including a process for a uniform definition of child abuse and neglect fatalities, as recommended by the Congressionally-mandated *Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse Fatalities*. This is essential to make sure state and local governments have the information they need to keep more vulnerable children alive.

Thank you for your commitment to the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect, and to improving the lives of children and families across our country. The National Child Abuse Coalition and its members stand ready to continue to work with you to further strengthen the bill as reauthorization moves through Congress.

Sincerely,



Ruth J. Friedman, Ph.D.
Executive Director
National Child Abuse Coalition