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July 11, 2006

The Honorable Arlen Specter  
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
184 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510-6034

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
184 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510-6034

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member:

Your Subcommittee will soon consider Fiscal Year 2007 appropriations recommendations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education. On behalf of the American Bar Association, I am writing to urge your support for increased funding for programs under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) to \$42 million in FY07 for CAPTA basic state grants and \$65 million for CAPTA Title II community-based prevention grants. In addition, we urge funding for the CAPTA discretionary research and demonstration grants at the authorized level of \$35 million.

We believe that federal funding to help states and communities protect children and prevent child abuse and neglect should be a congressional priority. Adequate funding is essential to getting the job done, but CAPTA funds have not kept pace with the scope of the problem. In 2004, the latest year for which we have data, an estimated 3 million reports of possible abuse and neglect were made to states, and almost 900,000 of these reports were substantiated, according the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Over 40 percent of child victims received no services following a substantiated report of maltreatment in 2004. Almost 1,500 children died as a result of abuse or neglect. The most endangered children are disproportionately the youngest. The 2004 data show that more than 80 percent of children who were killed by abusers were younger than 4 years old, and 44 percent of those never reached their first birthday.

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Far too little attention in federal, state or local child welfare funding is directed at preventing harm to children from ever happening in the first place or providing the appropriate services needed by families and children victimized by abuse or neglect. For every dollar spent on foster care and adoption subsidies, we spend less than 10 cents in federal child welfare funding on preventing and treating child abuse and neglect. Preventing child abuse is cost effective. A GAO evaluation of child abuse prevention efforts found “total federal costs of providing prevention programs for low-income populations were nearly offset after four years.” Community prevention services to overburdened families are far less costly than efforts to ameliorate the damage inflicted on children from abuse and neglect. While no one would argue that we should not help to protect the children who have been the most seriously injured, we can do better to protect children than to wait until the damage is so bad that we have no other choice. Increased funding for CAPTA's basic state grants and community-based prevention grants will help in a small though constructive way to begin to address that imbalance.

CAPTA funds have been virtually frozen for a decade. Current funding levels short-change community efforts to develop innovative programs to serve children and families and to improve our knowledge about child maltreatment. At current funding, HHS is able to fund only one out of eight applications for field-initiated research. An appropriation of \$35 million would support research and program innovations, as well as fund the training, technical assistance, and data collection also authorized by CAPTA.

Your dedicated advocacy in support of programs to protect children and prevent child abuse and neglect helps to focus constructive public policies on these important issues. We hope we can count on your leadership to support these modest increases for CAPTA basic state grants, community-based prevention grants and research and demonstration grants, and provide the resources needed to stem the tide of child maltreatment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert D. Evans".

Robert D. Evans

Cc: Members of the Subcommittee