

April 21, 2008

The Honorable David R. Obey
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor, HHS and Education
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James T. Walsh
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS and Education
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Walsh:

Your Subcommittee will soon consider Fiscal Year 2009 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 funding for programs under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) at the authorized levels of \$84 million in FY 2009 for CAPTA basic state grants and \$80 million for CAPTA Title II community-based prevention grants. In addition, we urge funding for the CAPTA discretionary research and demonstration grants at the level of \$37 million.

Basic State Grants.

CAPTA funding helps states improve the child protective services infrastructure for screening, assessing and investigating each year more than 3 million reports of possible abuse and neglect of children. CAPTA's Basic State Grants have not kept pace with what the states and communities need to protect children. At current funding levels – slightly more than one-fourth the authorized amount – child protection agencies are unable to serve hundreds of thousands of abused and neglected children in their caseloads. In 2005, according to the most recent HHS data, over 3 million reports of possible abuse and neglect were made to states, and almost 900,000 of these reports were substantiated. In 2005, according to the most recent HHS data, almost 40 percent of child victims received no services following a substantiated report of maltreatment: suspected abuse was reported, the report was investigated, the report was substantiated, and the case was closed.

States are hard pressed to treat children or protect them from further harm. In 2005, close to 1,500 children died as a result of abuse or neglect and more than three-quarters of those killed were under age four. Federal officials have repeatedly cited states for certain deficiencies: significant numbers of children suffering abuse or neglect more than once in a six-month period; caseworkers not visiting children often enough to assess needs; and failure to provide promised medical and mental health services. Funding CAPTA state grants at \$84 million 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 other at-risk families.

Community-Based Prevention Grants.

CAPTA's Prevention Grants help states to develop community-based prevention services, including parenting education, home visiting services, and respite care. Billions of dollars in public funds are spent every year on foster care to protect the children who have been the most seriously injured; but for every federal dollar spent on foster care and adoption subsidies, we spend less than 14 cents in federal child welfare funding on preventing and treating child abuse and neglect.

What's more, while federal funds for removing children to safe placements out of their homes have been on the increase – paying for an outcome none of us want – funds for protection of children and prevention of abuse have been in decline. We must do more to protect children before the situation has deteriorated to the point that we have no other choice than to remove them from their homes.

Funding CAPTA prevention grants at \$80 million would help communities support proven, cost-effective approaches to preventing child abuse and neglect. Community services to prevent child abuse are far less costly than the damage inflicted on children from abuse and neglect. 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."

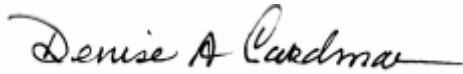
Discretionary Research and Demonstration Grants.

CAPTA's discretionary competitive grants support the research and program innovations which improve our ability to prevent child maltreatment and to protect children from harm. For example, in recent years, CAPTA grants have supported efforts to identify ways for communities to protect and treat drug-exposed newborns; other grants have pointed the way toward developing family assessments to improve the outcomes for child protective services.

Funding research and program innovations at the level of \$37 million would provide support for the field-initiated research, model program development, training, technical assistance, and data collection authorized by CAPTA out of this money as well as continue funding for a diversity of home visitation models included in the administration's budget proposal. Current funding levels, unfortunately, continue to short-change community efforts at building innovative approaches to serve children and families and to improve our knowledge about child maltreatment.

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 increased funding levels 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 black ink that reads "Denise A. Cardman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Denise A. Cardman
Acting Director

Cc: Members of the Subcommittee