

November 25, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
Office of Presidential Transitions
Washington DC, 20270

Dear President-elect Obama:

Prevent Child Abuse America and our national network of 47 state chapters and over than 400 Healthy Families America home visitation programs, congratulate you on your election to the office of President of the United States of America.

Like you, our organization believes that the early years are a critical time for a developing child. Please count on this organization’s knowledge, extensive communications network and support for public policies that address the problems that arise when a child is denied healthy childhood experiences. Research is clear that there is a relationship between child abuse and neglect and often life long consequences in many other areas, including chronic health problems, academic achievement, juvenile delinquency, criminal behavior, drug abuse and mental health issues. Our organization is committed to working with your Administration to help ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow up in a nurturing, stimulating and stable environment. Below for your consideration are policy recommendations to promote healthy child development based in proven prevention strategies.

1. Develop a National Strategy for Prevention

Sustainable change cannot occur until there is a national policy and commitment to prevent child abuse and neglect. Implementing a national strategy will require the coordination of federal agencies, and the assurance that all federal funding, policies, and regulations related to child well-being are coordinated and working towards complimentary goals. The attached paper, ***A New Way of Thinking About Prevention***, outlines specific steps that our nation must take to embrace child abuse and neglect prevention in a more effective, meaningful, and comprehensive manner.

2. Invest in Evidence-Based Early Childhood Home Visitation

Prevent Child Abuse America is grateful for your support of early childhood home visitation, and for your commitment to making a range of quality home visiting programs more widely available, as evidenced by your support as Senator of the *Education Begins at Home Act (EBAH)*. Introduced by Senators Hillary Clinton and Chris Bond and Representatives Danny Davis and Todd Platts, EBAH enjoys broad bipartisan support and has been endorsed by over 700 national, state and local organizations. The House Committee on Education & Labor passed EBAH earlier this year by a voice vote, setting the bill up for early action in the 111th Congress. I urge you to

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Mission Statement

To prevent the abuse and neglect of our nation’s children.

work with Congress to ensure the immediate enactment and funding of EBAH in 2009.

Thank you for promoting the successes of the Nurse-Family Partnership home visitation model throughout your campaign. Those same successes have been achieved in other home visitation service models and I ask that you extend your support to them as well. A compelling body of research demonstrates the measurable outcomes attributable to programs that employ home visitors with a wide range of backgrounds. For example, results from the randomized trial of a Healthy Families New York program, based on the Healthy Families America model using Family Support Workers, showed that the program had positive effects in the areas of parenting and child abuse and neglect, birth outcomes, and health care.¹ Please see the attached fact sheets for more information on the research supporting Healthy Families America, and the attached ***Evidence-based Early Childhood Home Visitation Programs*** for information on the research supporting a number of home visitation models.

3. Increase Investments in Prevention

For far too long, prevention has been undervalued and underfunded. We urge you to support increasing investments in prevention through both discretionary and mandatory funding mechanisms.

- ***Fully Fund the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act:***
CAPTA embodies the federal commitment to preventing child maltreatment, but has not been funded adequately to meet the demand for community-based prevention programs. Please support fully funding the following components of CAPTA:
 - ***CAPTA state grants,*** which provide funds for states to improve child protective services. Full funding will shorten the time that post-investigative services are delivered, and increase the number of children and families who receive these services.
 - ***CAPTA community-based grants,*** which help states develop and implement effective approaches to preventing child abuse and neglect. Full funding will provide communities with additional support to implement effective prevention strategies such as parenting education, home visiting programs, mutual self-help support groups for parents, and crisis nurseries.
 - ***CAPTA discretionary research and demonstration grants.*** Full funding will help pay for valuable data collection, technical assistance, and grant-funded research and demonstration projects. I also ask that you support the

¹ DuMont, Kimberly A., Susan Mitchell-Herzfeld, Rose Greene, Eunju Lee, Ann Lowenfels, and Monica Rodriguez, *Healthy Families New York (HFNY) Randomized Trial: Impacts on Parenting After the First Two Years*, Rensselaer, N.Y.: New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Bureau of Evaluation and Research; Albany, N.Y.: Center for Human Services Research, State University of New York at Albany, Albany, N.Y.: Department of Psychology, State University of New York at Albany, June 2006. As of January 2008:

<http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/prevention/assets/HFNYRandomizedTrialWorkingPaper.pdf>

continuation of a \$10 million allocation from this funding to support evidence-based home visitation.

- **Fully Fund Promoting Safe and Stable Families:** PSSF grants help states pay for family support, family preservation, family reunification, and adoption support. Unfortunately, the PSSF discretionary grant is currently funded at just \$63.3 million. Fully funding the PSSF discretionary grant at \$200 million will promote the expansion of family support services in communities across the nation and provide more intensive help for families in crisis. Research is clear that by investing in positive outcomes for children and families, family support and family strengthening programs can also lead to fewer incidences of child abuse and neglect.
- **Reform the Child Welfare Financing Structure:** States may access dollars under Title IV-E, the principal source of federal child welfare funding, only after children have been removed from their home and enter foster care. Of the \$7.2 billion federal funds dedicated for child welfare in 2007, approximately 90 percent supported children in foster care placements (\$4.5 billion) and children adopted from foster care (\$2.0 billion). States can use about 10 percent of federal funding dedicated child welfare funds flexibly for family services and supports, including prevention or reunification services. Prevent Child Abuse America urges you to support initiatives that will secure adequate, guaranteed funding for front-end, prevention services while ensuring an effective approach to child welfare that provides for a full continuum of care.
- **Fully Fund the Social Services Block Grant:** HHS reports that SSBG funded preventive services for 29 percent of the total child recipients of preventive services in 2005. Despite the many critical services that SSBG makes possible, funding for the block grant has been chipped away over the past decade from a high of \$2.8 billion a year to its current level of \$1.7 billion a year. Prevent Child Abuse America urges you to support restoring SSBG to \$2.8 billion.
- **Enact the Shaken Baby Syndrome Prevention Act:** Introduced by Senator Chris Dodd and Representative Nita Lowey, the legislation would provide \$10 million to HHS to develop and implement a public information and education campaign aimed at preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS). SBS prevention programs have demonstrated that educating parents and other caregivers about healthy strategies for coping with a crying infant, infant soothing skills, and the danger of shaking young children can bring about a significant reduction in the number of SBS cases.
- **Increase resources in the work of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center for Injury Prevention and Control** to address child maltreatment through a public health approach. This approach will compliment the other

federal initiatives and efforts and can provide another inter-agency link toward a unified and integrative approach to address child abuse and neglect prevention. The CDC's child maltreatment prevention work is designed to better understand the scope, causes, and consequences of child abuse and neglect, and to identify and disseminate effective prevention strategies. They are a critical partner in preventing child abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place.

Conclusion

Prevent Child Abuse America believes that there is no issue more important to the future of our society than how we raise our youth. Yet, a recent UNICEF report found the United States was ranked 20th in child well-being out of the world's 21 wealthiest nations.² The measures used by UNICEF represent educational, health and safety, material, and family and peer well being; measures that can reduce the potential for child maltreatment. The UNICEF study reinforces countless reports and government data showing that child neglect and maltreatment is a significant but preventable public health problem in our country today.

Research, such as the *Adverse Childhood Experiences* study,³ has shown that child abuse and neglect have life-long impacts, not only for child but for the nation. These studies show a strong correlation between child abuse and neglect and debilitating and chronic health consequences, delinquency, criminal behavior, mental health illness, drug dependency and lower academic performance.

Getting prevention right early is less costly to the nation, and to individuals, than trying to fix things later. Prevent Child Abuse America estimates that implementing effective policies and strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect can save taxpayers \$104 billion per year. The cost of not doing so includes more than \$33 billion in direct costs for foster care services, hospitalization, mental health treatment, and law enforcement. Indirect costs of over \$70 billion include loss of productivity, as well as expenditures related to chronic health problems, special education, and the criminal justice system.⁴

With your leadership, together we will finally be able to shift our federal policies *from* addressing the issues that arise because of child abuse and neglect *towards* making sure that abuse and neglect does not occur in the

² United Nations Children's Fund (2007). *Child Poverty in Perspective: An overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries*. Innocenti Report Card 7, UNICEF Innocenti Research Center, Florence, Italy, p. 2.

<http://www.unicef.org/media/files/ChildPovertyReport.pdf>

³ Felitti, VJ, Anda, RF, Nordenberg, D, Williamson, DF, Spitz, AM, Edwards, V, Koss, MP, & Marks, JS. (1998). [The relationship of adult health status to childhood abuse and household dysfunction](#). *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14, 245-258.

<http://download.journals.elsevierhealth.com/pdfs/journals/07493797/PIIS0749379798000178.pdf>

⁴ (1) Wang, CT, & Holton, J (2007). *Total estimated cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States*. Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America.

http://www.preventchildabuse.org/about_us/media_releases/pcaa_pew_economic_impact_study_final.pdf

first place. Please consider Prevent Child Abuse America and our national network a resource to you as you consider opportunities to address this pressing issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James M. Hmurovich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

James M. Hmurovich
President & CEO

cc: Melody Barnes, Director-designate, Domestic Policy Council

Peter Orszag, Office of Management and Budget Director-designate

Heather Higginbottom, Deputy Director-designate, Domestic Policy Council

Rob Nabors as Office of Management and Budget Deputy Director-designate