



## The National Coalition to End Child Abuse Deaths

The Honorable Geoff Davis  
Chairman  
House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources  
1119 Longworth House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Davis:

Thank you for holding a hearing on child deaths due to maltreatment and the opportunity to testify on this tragic issue.

Thank you also for this additional opportunity to share the recommendations of the organization for which I am the celebrity spokesperson; the National Coalition to End Child Abuse Deaths. The Coalition is made up of five national organizations (see above) that came together over a collective concern for the growing number of child abuse deaths in the United States.

The Coalition developed a list of recommendations at the Summit to End Child Abuse and Neglect Deaths in America in 2009. They are based on research and collaboration with 150 national experts in child welfare. While some of the recommendations would require additional funds spent on child protection and prevention, many no-cost items could reduce deaths and improve how states respond to these deaths.

No-Cost Recommendations:

1. *Amend current federal and state confidentiality laws:* Originally intended to protect living child victims from publicity, confidentiality laws have become a hindrance to a better public understanding of child abuse and neglect fatalities. The withholding of such information, especially between jurisdictions and between agencies, can be detrimental and cost children their lives. Congress should consider modifications to confidentiality laws to allow policy makers, the press, and the public to understand better what protection policies and practices need to be improved in the aftermath of a child's death, while still protecting the rights of children and families.
2. *Child welfare financing reform* is crucial to make child protective services an entitlement for eligible children, creating a system in which families are able to get the supports and services they need to prevent maltreatment from occurring.
3. *Standardize data collection about maltreatment deaths to lead to quality national statistics that will inform effective prevention strategies,* and require states to provide such data to the

Department of Health and Human Services and within and across systems in order to receive federal funds.

4. *The creation of a federal child death review law.* Even though child death review is the most effective way to identify and count child abuse and neglect deaths, not all states review every death from external causes.
5. *Health and Human Services in conjunction with the Department of Justice should develop a model protocol to ensure that civil and criminal legal proceedings related to child abuse and neglect are closely coordinated with relevant agencies.* Included in this multidisciplinary approach should be law enforcement, prosecutors, child welfare workers and also medical professionals, who may be the first to come into contact with an abused child.

Low-Cost Recommendations:

6. *Develop a public education campaign to encourage public reporting of child abuse and neglect and to enlist communities in the protection of children.* Many maltreatment deaths arise from neglect; thus the issue of child neglect should receive equal focus in a public education campaign and by child protection professionals.
7. *Develop a national, multi-agency strategy for stopping maltreatment deaths.* NCECAD is calling for a **National Commission on Child Abuse and Neglect Deaths** to study and evaluate federal, state, and local public and private child welfare systems. Currently, child welfare systems operate independently from state to state, and even county to county. Variations in policy and competency among states can make the difference between whether children live or die. A low-cost commission on this complex policy issue would provide an opportunity for in depth examination and reduce the risk of implementing policy changes that may lead to unintended consequences.

Cost Recommendations:

8. *Increase current federal spending on child protection by three to five billion dollars.* Current levels of federal spending are far below the level needed to protect all children at imminent risk. Increased funds would allow child protective workers and other frontline personnel to have smaller caseloads and better training to be better prepared for immediately protecting children. With smaller worker caseloads, the children would be better protected, and the workers would consider lifelong careers in child protection, thus bringing needed maturity and experience to the system. Continuing education and training across disciplines should be mandated, focusing especially on licensure, accreditation, and support for sub-specialties. Funds are also needed to provide a wide array of public health and social services to help at-risk kids, including comprehensive in-home services for all children already in the system.

Again, thank you for this opportunity. If there is anything else I can do to help raise awareness of this issue, please let me know. If you have further questions about the above recommendations, our Coordinator, Kimberly Day, will be happy to assist you. She can be reached at 202-223-8864.

Sincerely,

Tamara Tunie