



August 5, 2011

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 the opportunity to testify on July 12th at the hearing on Child Deaths Due to Maltreatment and for this opportunity provide further clarification on one of the recommendations made at the hearing.

To better protect children at imminent risk of severe harm, the federal government, led by the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services, and in cooperation with states, should adopt a model protocol for assuring that civil and criminal legal proceedings are closely coordinated between child protection and law enforcement agencies. The current lack of coordinated intervention for children at risk of fatal child maltreatment is a key flaw in the current response system. Differing protocols for identification of, and response to, those children who are most at risk have contributed to the disparate risk of death for maltreated children by state and locality. Enhancing coordination between law enforcement, child protection, prosecution, medical providers, victim advocates, and mental health professionals, would empower local communities to effectively intervene in high risk physical abuse and neglect cases and prevent child abuse fatalities. There is substantial evidence that Children's Advocacy Centers have been an efficient and effective mechanism in child sexual abuse cases to coordinate a multidisciplinary response and assure better outcomes for sexually abused children. Indeed, Children's Advocacy Centers, have been long-recognized as a Model Program by the US Department of Justice, and funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for just this purpose. I propose expanding this model to cases of severe physical abuse and high-risk neglect cases as a strategy for preventing child abuse fatalities.

There are now over 700 Children's Advocacy Centers in the US. These centers served more than 259,000 sexually abused children in 2009. Some of these centers already serve children who have been severely physically abused and/or neglected. The goal of the proposed Project for Children's Advocacy Center and Multidisciplinary Team Intervention would be to apply the multidisciplinary team approach to child abuse investigations, prosecution, and treatment for those children most at risk of fatal child maltreatment.





This could be accomplished by:

- Identifying existing model protocols for response to children most at risk of fatal child abuse and neglect.
- Partnering between the existing Child Death Review Team and the Children's Advocacy Centers to ensure that cross-communication is timely and information-sharing complete.

An important factor in identifying which cases would participate in the CAC's pilot project is the identification of cases using commonly understood definitions of child maltreatment. Therefore, another recommendation would be that Congress address the differences in state definitions and interpretations of maltreatment.

If you have questions about the above recommendations, please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-223-8177.

Sincerely,

Michael Petit, President
Every Child Matters Education Fund

