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PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

**Written Statement of the American Psychological Association**  
**Submitted to the**  
**United States House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means**  
**Subcommittee on Human Resources**  
**on**  
**Proposal to Reduce Child Deaths Due to Maltreatment**

**December 13, 2012**

On behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA), thank you for holding hearings on reducing child deaths due to maltreatment and for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record. APA, the largest scientific and professional organization of psychologists in the United States with more than 137,000 members and affiliates, works to advance psychology as a science, a profession, and a means of promoting health, education, and human welfare. APA promotes scientific inquiry, professional practice, training, and advocacy on the prevention of child maltreatment.

APA supports the Protect our Kids Act, a bipartisan proposal developed by Committee Chairman Camp and Subcommittee Ranking Member Doggett to establish a commission tasked with developing recommendations for reducing child deaths due to maltreatment. This draft legislation is an important step toward a national commitment to ending child deaths from abuse and neglect. APA and the psychology community appreciate and support the inclusion of those with expertise in “child psychology and mental health” on the commission.

Unfortunately, child maltreatment is a pervasive national problem. The congressionally mandated Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) found that one child in 25 in the U.S., or 2.9 million children, experienced some kind of abuse or neglect in 2005–06. For fiscal year 2011, states reported 1,545 child deaths due to maltreatment to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System. This number is likely an underestimate, according to the Government Accountability Office report *Child Maltreatment: Strengthening National Data on Child Fatalities Could Aid in Prevention*. The NIS-4, which relies on multiple sources of information on child deaths, estimated that 2,400 children died from maltreatment in a single year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has estimated the total lifetime costs associated with a single year of confirmed cases of child maltreatment at \$124 billion. The value of a child’s life lost to maltreatment is incalculable.

Fortunately, child maltreatment can be prevented. Psychological research has produced programs that have been shown, through rigorous scientific evaluation, to be effective in preventing child maltreatment. Approaches used by effective programs include multilevel public health interventions, home visitation, and coordinated, family-centered services. Despite advances in the development of evidence-based prevention programs, however, more work is needed. Documented evidence of effectiveness through rigorous research is still the exception, rather than the norm, among child maltreatment prevention efforts. Effective prevention programs face challenges in large-scale implementation and in adapting to local conditions and cultures while maintaining fidelity to the elements of the intervention that make it effective. APA and the psychology community stand ready to support the commission in meeting these challenges.

Prevention of child maltreatment is also hampered by lack of coordination across systems and jurisdictions. Multiple public and private systems are involved in preventing and responding to child maltreatment. Service delivery systems related to health care, mental health, substance abuse, housing, child care, and income support often are not integrated with each other. Mandated reporting laws vary from state to state with respect to how child abuse is defined and the minimal criteria that need to be reached in order for a mandated report to be made. States

also vary widely in their ability to investigate reports of child maltreatment and to provide services to families, largely due to resources allocated to child welfare services.

Overcoming these challenges requires a comprehensive national strategy to end child maltreatment deaths, based on accurate information about child maltreatment risk factors, barriers to prevention, and effective services and policies. This is exactly what a national commission, with expertise from a wide range of fields relevant to child maltreatment, would provide. The Subcommittee is to be commended for its leadership in advancing this important bipartisan legislation.

APA and the psychology community look forward to continuing to work with you to prevent child abuse and neglect, to intervene early when instances of maltreatment become known, and to provide effective mental health and related treatment to children and their families. Such efforts will help to ensure that all children are safe and that families receive the services and supports that they need and deserve.