

March 11, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-146A The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Leahy and Ranking Member Shelby:

The undersigned organizations write to you today to respectfully request that you include \$10 million in funding for the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to research child sexual abuse prevention in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill. We commend the Appropriations Committees for the inclusion of \$1.5 million in FY 2021 funding bill. This investment is a crucial first step, but increased funding is needed.

Child sexual abuse and the damage it causes to children, adults, families, and communities too often makes headlines. Astoundingly, approximately 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 13 boys will become victims of this crime. Child sexual abuse is associated with short- and long-term mental and physical health problems that shorten the lifespan and reduce its quality. Effects include increased risk for post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use disorders (including opioid abuse), HIV, heart disease, and suicide. It is no surprise that a recent study found that the economic burden of child sexual abuse was \$9.3 billion in 2015, costing each victim more than \$280,000 in earnings and other losses over their lifetime.¹

The federal government rightly funds treatment and other services for crime victims, including victims of child sexual abuse, and funds criminal justice efforts to detect, prosecute, and hold accountable those who commit child sexual abuse. Indeed, the federal government annually spends \$512,000,000 solely to incarcerate sex offenders in federal facilities. As important as these efforts are, they do little if anything to prevent harm from occurring in the first place. An inadequate focus on preventing child sexual abuse stands in stark contrast to robust federal efforts that address all other forms of child victimization as preventable public health problems and not solely criminal justice problems. For decades, we have supported the development, validation, and dissemination of programs such as home visitation that effectively prevent child physical abuse and neglect, as well as school-based programs that effectively prevent peer-on-peer bullying and teen dating violence. The lack of similar strategies to prevent child sexual abuse is primarily due to the failure to fund similar research in this space.

¹ 1 Letourneau, Elizabeth J., et al. "The Economic Burden of Child Sexual Abuse in the United States." *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 79, 2018, pp. 413–422., doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.02.020.

The FY 2019 appropriations bill directed the CDC to release a report on the current state of child sexual abuse prevention research. [The report](#), released in December 2019, outlined significant gaps in existing research efforts, which include the need to: improve surveillance systems and data collection; increase the understanding of risk and protective factors, as well as the need to strengthen, develop, and disseminate evidence-based prevention policies, programs, and practices.

In FY 2020, \$1 million was allocated to the CDC's Division of Violence Prevention, which funded two grants to study perpetration prevention. The \$500,000 increase in FY 2021 is much appreciated; however, it is critical that additional funding be allocated in FY 2022 to fund further research in each of these aforementioned areas identified by the CDC.

In the absence of validated prevention efforts, organizations and individuals that work with children have had to develop and implement idiosyncratic and untested prevention efforts. Youth-serving organizations, schools, religious groups, sports clubs, after-school programs, child care settings, hospitals, and other youth-focused organizations have to create and recreate their untested prevention strategies. Indeed, many states mandate that child sexual abuse prevention curricula be implemented in K-12 schools, yet few have been tested for their effectiveness. There is no way to tell if any given prevention effort might be effective, ineffective, or even harmful to children in the absence of evaluation.

If we are to achieve child sexual abuse prevention at a large scale, then a significant federal investment in child sexual abuse prevention research is needed. The philanthropic community currently supporting prevention research and evaluation cannot continue to fund it alone.

We all want American children to grow up free from abuse. We urge you to make this a reality by including \$10 million for research on the primary prevention of child sexual abuse at the CDC as a priority in your negotiations to fund the government in FY 2022.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Abuse Prevention Solutions, LLC
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children Inc.
American Psychological Association
Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers
Boy Scouts of America
California Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Camp Fire National
Chicago Children's Advocacy Center
Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas (CACTX)
Committee for Children
Communities In Schools National Office
Darkness to Light
ECPAT-USA

Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center
JCC Association of North America
KidSafe Foundation
MassKids and the Enough Abuse Campaign
Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse
Mujeres Latinas En Accion
National Children's Alliance
National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation
Prevent Child Abuse America
Prevention Institute
Redwoods Group Foundation
Sacred Spaces
Safe States Alliance
Savvy Parents Safe Kids
Stop It Now!
The Chicago Children's Advocacy Center
Thorn
Together for Girls
YMCA of the USA
Youth Outreach Services