

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 19, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Room H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John A. Boehner, Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Room 1011, Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David R. Obey, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Room H218, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Room 1016, Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Boehner, Chairman Obey, and Ranking Member Lewis:

We are writing to urge attention in the economic stimulus package to the importance of protecting vulnerable children from abuse and neglect and supporting parents in a time of economic distress. During times of economic hardship and unemployment, child abuse and neglect rates often rise. Over the years, research reveals that rates of child abuse are higher in areas characterized by unusually high rates of unemployment¹ and that increases in child abuse are preceded by periods of high job loss.² The National Research Council has identified unemployment among the stresses associated with child maltreatment in families.³

In fact, poverty is the single best predictor of child maltreatment. According to the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect, children from families with incomes below \$15,000 per year are more than 22 times likely to experience abuse or neglect than children living in families with incomes of \$30,000 or more.⁴ Most children in the child welfare system are from low-income families. Financial difficulties create parental stress, which contributes to child abuse; lack of finances further results in greater reports of neglect due to the inability of poor families to secure adequate child care.⁵ While most poor people do not maltreat their children, poverty – particularly

¹ Cochran, M. and Bronfenbrenner, U. "Child Rearing, Parenthood, and the World of Work." In C. Kerr & J. Rosen (Eds.), *Work in America: The Decade Ahead*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1979.

² Steinberg, L.D., Catalano, R. and Dooley, D. "Economic Antecedents of Child Abuse and Neglect." *Child Development*, 1981, 52, 975-985.

³ Panel on Research on Child Abuse and Neglect, National Research Council (1993). *Understanding Child Abuse*. National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC.

⁴ Sedlak, A.J. & Broadhurst, D. D. *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996.

⁵ Waldfogel, J. *What We Know and Don't Know About the State of the Child Protective Services System and About the Links Between Poverty and Child Maltreatment*. Columbia University, School of Social Work. New York, 2000.

when interacting with other risk factors, including unemployment – increases the likelihood of maltreatment.⁶ Particularly in cases of neglect, poverty and unemployment show strong associations with child maltreatment.⁷ In times of unemployment and economic hardship, families may be forced to choose between paying for heat or food, or they may lose their homes. If they do not have a safety net to fall back on, the children may experience neglect and end up in foster care. The stress that flows from job loss and economic hardship may also push parents over the edge so their behavior becomes harsh, even abusive. Thus, during times of crisis families need additional supports and services to prevent maltreatment from occurring.

We propose that the following initiatives be included in the economic stimulus package to provide financial assistance to states and communities with high levels of unemployment to meet increased demands for child protective services and preventive services to support parents.

1. **Increase funding for the Social Services Block Grant.** An additional \$1 billion for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), targeted for support of child welfare services, would assist states with significant numbers of unemployed persons in handling greater numbers of cases of child abuse and neglect. These additional SSBG funds would enable states to address infrastructure and staffing needs in child welfare services as well as to provide support directly for a range of additional services that families need in times of crisis. The flexibility of SSBG is one of its strengths for responding to the crisis.

The child protection system, already stretched beyond capacity, requires special attention in times of increased economic hardships with increased demands for services. Even now, the average caseload for child welfare workers is double the recommended level, and obviously much higher in many jurisdictions.⁸ We should not fail our children and America's families by failing to invest in a responsive, working child protection system. The SSBG funding would enable state child protective services to expand post-investigative services for child victims, shorten the time to the delivery of services, and increase services to at-risk families.

2. **Increase funding for the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grants.** An additional \$100 million for the prevention grants authorized under Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) would help states provide support to the community-based child abuse prevention programs that offer the supportive services needed by parents and families experiencing the stresses of unemployment and economic hardship. Communities across the country have developed preventive services which show success in support programs for new parents, home visitor services, respite and crisis care, parent mutual support, and family support services. These community-based organizations play a critical role in delivering prevention

⁶ *A Coordinated Response to Child Abuse and Neglect: The Foundation for Practice. [CD-ROM Version], User Manual Series (2003), Author(s): Office on Child Abuse and Neglect (HHS) Goldman, Salus, Wolcott, Kennedy Chapter Five: What Factors Contribute to Child Abuse and Neglect?*

⁷ Drake, B., & Pandey, S. (1996). Understanding the relationship between neighborhood poverty and specific types of child maltreatment. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 20(11), 1003-1018.

⁸ Alliance for Children and Families, American Public Human Services Association, Child Welfare League of America (2001). *The child welfare workforce challenge: Results from a preliminary study*. Dallas.

services, but their budgets—often based on charitable donations—are likely to suffer during difficult economic times.

These provisions in the emergency stimulus package would enable states to distribute assistance efficiently and quickly through the already established funding mechanisms of the CAPTA Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grants and the Social Services Block Grants for protecting vulnerable children from abuse and neglect and supporting parents in time of economic hardship.

Thank you for your continuing support of programs to protect children and to prevent child abuse and neglect. We hope we can count on your leadership to promote these increased funding levels for the CAPTA community-based prevention grants and the Social Services Block Grants. We greatly appreciate your commitment to ensuring that vulnerable families and children at risk of abuse or neglect receive support as part of the economic stimulus package, and we thank you for your consideration of this request.

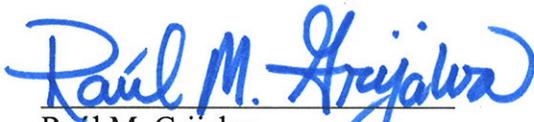
Sincerely,



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



Fortney "Pete" Stark
Member of Congress



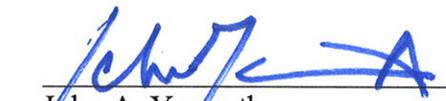
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress



Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Member of Congress



John A. Yarmuth
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Dennis J. Kucinich
Member of Congress

Mazie K. Hirono

Mazie K. Hirono
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

Eleanor H. Norton

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Chaka Fattah

Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress