

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

Dear Chairs Lowey and Shelby, and Ranking Members Granger and Leahy:

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 conduct research on child sexual abuse prevention in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill. We commend the Appropriations Committees for the inclusion of \$1 million in FY 2020 funding bill, and the corresponding report language. This is an important first step, but a higher level of investment 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 as 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 largely a result of the failing 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.

In the FY 2019 appropriations bill, the CDC was directed to release a report on the current state of child sexual abuse prevention research. [The report](#), released in December 2019, outlined major gaps in current 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 the absence of validated prevention efforts, organizations and individuals that work with children have had to develop and implement their own 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 own untested prevention strategies. Indeed, many states mandate that child sexual abuse prevention curricula be implemented, yet none have been tested for their effectiveness. In the absence of evaluation, there is no way to tell if any given prevention effort might be effective, ineffective, or even harmful to children.

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 2021.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Abuse Prevention Solutions, LLC
American Psychological Association
Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers
Boy Scouts of America
Chicago Children's Advocacy Center
Children's Advocacy Institute
Children's Trust Fund Alliance
Committee for Children
Communities In Schools National Office
ECPAT-USA
Imagination Theater, Inc.
KidSafe Foundation
Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Mujeres Latinas en Accion
National Children's Alliance
Prevent Child Abuse America
Prevent Child Abuse Vermont
Prevention Institute
Resilience, formerly Rape Victim Advocates
Sacred Spaces

Safe States Alliance

Savvy Parents Safe Kids

Stop It Now!

The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children

The Redwoods Group Foundation

Thorn

YMCA of the USA

Youth Outreach Services