

April 27, 2022

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

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairwoman  
House Committee on Appropriations  
H-307, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

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

Dear Chair Leahy, Ranking Member Shelby, Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Granger:

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) 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill. We commend the Appropriations Committees for the inclusion of \$2 million in FY 2022 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.<sup>1</sup>

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. In fact, a newly published study found that U.S. spends approximately \$5.4 billion *each year* to incarcerate people for sex crimes against children, including \$508 million annually on federal prisoners in 2021.<sup>2</sup> In 2021 Congress appropriated \$1.5 million for child sexual abuse prevention research. That means for every federal dollar spent on research, the U.S. spent about \$2982 on punishment. Child sexual abuse is indisputably a criminal justice problem as well as a public health problem. Despite the wide-ranging impact of child sexual abuse, there are currently very few scientifically validated prevention interventions. In the absence of validated prevention efforts, organizations and individuals that work with children developed and implemented idiosyncratic and

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Letourneau, E. (2022, March 23). No Check We Won't Write: A Report on the High Cost of Sex Offender Incarceration. Retrieved March 27, 2022, from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10790632221078305>

untested prevention efforts. 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.

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 increases in FY 2021 and again in FY 2022 are essential; however, it is critical that additional funding be allocated in FY 2023 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, childcare 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 2023.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Abuse Prevention Solutions, LLC  
American Camp Association  
American Psychological Association  
Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers  
Camp Fire National  
Chicago Children's Advocacy Center  
Child Injury Prevention Alliance

Children's Health Fund  
Committee for Children  
Darkness to Light  
ECPAT-USA  
Futures Without Violence  
Heartland Alliance Violence Recovery Services  
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine/Kennedy Krieger Institute  
Keep Kids Safe  
Kids and Car Safety  
KidSafe Foundation  
MASOC  
MassKids/Enough Abuse Campaign  
MATSA  
Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse  
Mujeres Latinas En Accion  
National Network of Public Health Institutes  
PCAR  
Praesidium  
Prevent Child Abuse America  
Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky  
Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina  
Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota  
Prevent Child Abuse Vermont  
Prevention Institute  
RALIANCE  
Redwoods Group Foundation  
Sacred Spaces  
Safe States Alliance  
Savvy Parents Safe Kids  
Stop It Now!  
TexProtects  
Thorn  
U.S. Center for SafeSport  
ValorUS  
YMCA of the USA