

March 22, 2019

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 new funding for the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), together with report language requiring these additional funds to be spent on prevention-focused research efforts, including the thoughtful development and rigorous evaluation of primary prevention interventions for child sexual abuse in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

Child sexual abuse and the damage it causes to children, adults, families, and communities too often makes headlines. Astoundingly, approximately 15 to 25 percent of girls and 5 to 10 percent of 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 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. As important as these efforts are, they do little if anything to prevent harm from occurring in the first place. The failure to 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. 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 gap in child sexual abuse is largely a result of the failing to fund similar research in this space.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 order to address this gap, youth serving organizations, schools, religious groups, and sports clubs have worked to implement their own prevention strategies. Further, many states have begun to look to ways they can prevent child sexual abuse, passing legislation requiring public schools to implement a child sexual abuse prevention program. While these efforts are a start, there are almost no prevention programs for child sexual abuse that have been rigorously tested or evaluated. In the absence of evaluation, there is no way to tell if any given prevention effort might be effective, ineffective, or even harmful. Moreover, the philanthropic community currently supporting prevention research and evaluation cannot continue to do so alone. Federal investment in child sexual abuse prevention is needed to develop and validate proven programs and policies, if we are to achieve child sexual abuse prevention at a large scale.

We commend the Appropriations Committees for the inclusion of report language in the FY 2019 bill requesting the CDC to report on its current activities related to the development and evaluation of primary public health interventions targeting child sexual abuse, to identify gaps in research that can be filled to promote the primary prevention of child sexual abuse, and to indicate what resources are needed to conduct such research. We look forward to the release of this report and believe it will further illustrate the need for dedicated funding for child sexual abuse prevention research.

We all want American children to grow up free from abuse. We urge you to make this a reality by including research on the primary prevention of child sexual abuse as a priority in your negotiations to fund the government in FY 2020.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Abuse Prevention Solutions, LLC

Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA)

Boys & Girls Clubs of America

Boys Scouts of America

Chicago Children's Advocacy Center

Children's Advocacy Institute

Committee for Children

Darkness to Light

KidSafe Foundation

Monique Burr Foundation for Children, Inc.

Moore Center for The Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds

National Children's Alliance

National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

National Council of Youth Sports

Prevent Child Abuse America

Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota

RALIANCE

Resilience, Rape Victim Advocates

Sensibilities Prevention Services

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)

Stop It Now!

The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children

The Healthy Relationships Project of Prevent Child Abuse Vermont

Thorn