



July 8, 2016

The Honorable Robert Casey, Jr.
United States Senate
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pat Toomey
United States Senate
248 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Casey and Toomey:

Daily the undersigned are engaged in diverse work to ensure every child is connected to a safe, stable and supported family. Despite the diversity of our work, we are united in our deep understanding that the foundation for lifelong health, well-being, educational success, and economic opportunity is established within the critical years of early childhood, especially from birth to age three.

Together we are urge your leadership to ensure immediate passage of:

- 1. The Family First Prevention Services Act (S.3065/H.R.5456); and**
- 2. The Plan of Safe Care Improvement Act (H.R. 4843/S.2687) which has been included within the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) negotiated by a conference committee.**

The Family First Prevention Services Act and the Plan of Safe Care Improvement Act provide tools needed **NOW** to help families, counties, service providers, and the Commonwealth to effectively fight the unrelenting and indiscriminate heroin and opioid epidemic.

These two unique pieces of legislation represent a positive development in that they rightfully recognize that protecting children is a shared responsibility – across disciplines and systems. Also these legislative vehicles provide an invitation for states to make decisions that are intentional and impactful across a number of federal statutes and funding streams (e.g., Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and the Social Security Act Titles IV-B and IV-E).

The Family First legislation shifts the dynamic toward prevention and effective earlier interventions. This legislation permits the use of federal funding for often overlooked and under-funded front-end services and supports that can prevent a child from being abused or placed in foster care. The legislation promotes a commitment to time-limited and evidence-based services on behalf of the child and the family, including services that are trauma-informed and can lessen the impact of mental health or substance abuse disorders. The legislation strengthens and continues the Regional Partnership Grants (RPGs) reinforcing that children who have a parent(s) with a substance use disorder require comprehensive and collaborative solutions.

Every 19 minutes a baby is born in America suffering through withdrawal from opioids. Between 2010 and 2014, more than 7,500 infants were born onto Medicaid and diagnosed with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) in Pennsylvania. Heroin and other opioids taken during pregnancy,

including drugs prescribed to a pregnant woman as part of her participation in substance abuse treatment (e.g., Methadone Buprenorphine), can result in NAS.

Since 2003, Congress has recognized the added vulnerability of infants born exposed prenatally to drugs and alcohol. Congress, however, also understood that improving the outcomes for the infant required a preventive, not punitive, approach that assessed and responded to the needs of the infant and parents. More than a decade later, states and local communities have struggled to effectively respond to these infants and their families, in part because of conflicting federal guidance as well as insufficient available resources through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA).

Babies in withdrawal and parents struggling with a substance use disorder require action now. We cannot afford to wait any longer to improve the safety, health and permanency outcomes for the most vulnerable victims of the opioid epidemic. Elevating the focus on these infants and improving outcomes for the child and their families, requires, at a minimum, passage of both the Family First Prevention Services Act and the Plan of Safe Care Improvement Act.

We stand ready to work with you toward achieving our shared vision that every child in Pennsylvania has the opportunity to live and thrive in safe and supported families.

Sincerely,

Tara Breitsprecher, Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy

American Academy of Pediatrics – PA Chapter

Denise Salerno, MD, FAAP, President

Network of Victim Assistance

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Office of Victim Advocate

Jennifer Storm, Victim Advocate

Children's Advocacy Center of Centre County, Mount Nittany Health

Kristina Taylor-Porter, Executive Director

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Rev. Sandra L. Strauss, Director of Advocacy

Disability Rights Pennsylvania

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PA Shaken Baby Syndrome Prevention Program

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Support Center for Child Advocates

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The Center for Children's Justice

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