

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

March 19, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Prevent Child Abuse America is joining child advocacy organizations across the United States in detailing essential recommendations for lawmakers to consider when developing an economic stimulus package in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

We urge you to consider the needs of one of the most vulnerable populations in this crisis: children. Parenting itself is a challenge. And, circumstances, undoubtedly, determine just how difficult it can be as a parent – even without the added stress of uncertainty, social isolation, job loss or reduction in wages, or inadequate food and shelter. We request dedicated funding to support essential services to families that will aid in reducing the stress and anxiety associated with this pandemic and ensure the safety and well-being of our nation’s children.

We are greatly concerned about reports that as much as 60% of the U.S. population lives paycheck to paycheck.¹ As parents are experiencing lost wages due to reduced work hours, lack of childcare, or budgets being stretched, parental stress increases. Access to concrete supports can be instrumental in lowering familial stress and incidence of child abuse and neglect. We urge you to incorporate policies in the economic stimulus package that increase the economic self-sufficiency of families and alleviate some parental stress, which will assist towards establishing more stable households and augment key factors that protect children.

Additional key investments in prevention services for families is essential to supporting communities by allowing for greater service delivery to address the needs of vulnerable families at the state and community levels.

We ask for you to act in the following ways:

Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP). We request \$1 billion for CBCAP grants to quickly and directly deploy emergency funding to local agencies and programs that are best suited to meet the needs of families in this crisis. Thanks to provisions in Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), the country already has in place a community-based prevention and intervention services system that can help to mitigate family stress and keep children safe, as well as respond when children are put at risk.

CBCAP, Title II of CAPTA, provides community based grants to all 50 states for services including *voluntary evidence-based home visiting programs, community-based parent support programs, early childhood and child care programs, family resources centers, respite care, services specific to domestic violence, and coordination and connection with mental health and substance use services, among others.* This also includes temporary housing support, transportation, and addressing the needs of children with disabilities.

CBCAP grants are already supporting community-based services that are trusted by families, such as Family Resource Centers, and their infrastructure will help to ensure that funding gets to the communities who need it most. Providing funding through these **pre-existing systems** will help to ensure that federal money is deployed effectively and efficiently assuring funding is getting to the programs already on the front lines that are best suited to meet the needs of children and families at this time. This funding is also vital to ensure that the numerous community-based nonprofits who are on the ground can continue to meet the needs of children and families during this crisis, as usually during economic downturns, these services are first to shutter their doors. Other examples of CBCAP funded services include:

- Parent Support Groups that support the development of safe, stable, nurturing relationships for children in their families and communities such as Circle of Parents, a parent support program that gives parents the opportunity to share in each other's challenges and successes while developing a network of support. Circle of Parents builds protective factors in families including: creating and enhancing social connections; enhancing parents' resiliency; increasing knowledge of parenting and child development; promoting social and emotional competence of children; and, increasing access to concrete support in times of need. These programs have already begun to adapt to this new crisis by being **offered via phone and video conferencing, depending on technology service and individual's technology access.** These programs are important now than ever.
- 1-800- Child Help Line has seen a doubling in calls which is often seen during an economic crisis. The hotline is staffed daily, 24 hours a day, with professional crisis counselors who offer crisis intervention, information, and referrals to thousands of emergency, social service, and support resources. The line is continuing to offer all parents support, resources and referrals for parents feeling isolated, worried about their families, concerned about being alone at home with children for days or weeks without a break, community resources like food, funds for utilities and rent or other essentials.
- Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are community-based resource hubs where families can access both formal and informal supports to promote their health and well-being. FRCs are flexible, family-focused facilities that provide programs and services based on the needs of the families that promote the strengthening of families. Most FRCs aim to be one-stop shops for children and parents with services that typically include some combination of the following: parent skill training, job training, substance abuse prevention, mental health services, housing support, crisis intervention services, literacy programs, and concrete supports such as food or clothing banks. These are operating in communities and designed to help stabilize families before child abuse and neglect occurs. As of today, 100% of FRCs around the country are still operating and serving families due to increased need from COVID-19.

CBCAP infrastructure is the right conduit to get emergency funding out to states and local communities so they can use it. During times of unprecedented stress, families are most challenged, and they need the support and resources CBCAP can provide in an ongoing way.

Expand the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit to reach low-income children and families and make federal resources available quickly and regularly during this public health crisis and economic slowdown. A families' financial stability not only reduces parental and family stress, but it allows children's basic needs to be satisfied. Financial insecurity leads to increased parental stress, which could be a trigger for abuse and neglect; while providing families with stronger household financial security reduces this stress and therefore the incidences of abuse and neglect. Furthermore, we know that stability is necessary for healthy childhood development, and that an immediate cash-transfer to low and middle-income families during this public health emergency will help to address the loss of income many households are experiencing currently, and that others will endure as businesses continue to close and layoffs occur in the near future. In addition, empowering families to meet their basic needs of food, shelter, and medical care by strengthening household financial security is proven to reduce the risk factors for child abuse and neglect, exemplified by the fact that states with refundable EITC had 13% fewer abusive head trauma admissions than states without EITC. EITC also has impacts on infant mortality, health insurance coverage, school performance, and maternal stress and mental health problems. Prevent Child Abuse America encourages the federal government to utilize the economic tools available to communities through *refundable* EITC's.ⁱⁱ Child tax credits are another policy solution to improve family financial security.

Expand Paid Family Leave. An expansion of paid family leave policies will cover working people to care for children without jeopardizing their economic security, a critical support to families during this pandemic. We know that juggling family responsibilities and job duties is more than a full plate for families, particularly given the current climate. Expanding Paid Family Leave policies by allowing parents to utilize accrued sick or vacation time and by reducing stipulations in the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) that do not cover employees working at small businesses (i.e., under 50 employees) or those who have been employed for less than a year in their current position (1,250 hours in prior 12-months), will lessen the economic burden and anxiety on parents at this time. Current requirements result in FMLA eligibility of roughly half of private sector employees (Han, Ruhm, Waldfogel, 2009), which disproportionately and negatively affects low-income mothers (Kerr, 2015). Family Leave is also significantly associated with higher rates of successful breastfeeding and maternal health, reductions in hospitalizations for abusive head trauma, and lower rates of family stressors and risk factors. Prevent Child Abuse America was extremely pleased that the second Covid-19 stimulus package Congress passed included 12 weeks of paid family leave for employees who go into quarantine, care for a family member in quarantine, or whose child's school is closed.

Provide Financial Support to Home Visiting Programs. We request \$100 million for emergency uses to state administrators and Tribal grantees in the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program and allow these funds to be used to support home visitors within the MIECHV program, paying home visitors even if they are unable to make visits. Voluntary home visiting creates connections between parents and health practitioners in the community, breaking down barriers to care and strengthening the link between healthcare resources and the families who need them. It also provides depression screening for all primary caregivers, both prenatally and postpartum, developmental screening for children, and connects caregivers in need with appropriate

community-based interventions. Finally, it targets the social determinants of health affecting families, such as parental stress, access to health care, income and poverty status, and environmental conditions.

In this current environment, families are experiencing greater stress and, now more than ever, support from a trusted home visitor is crucial to family and child health and well-being. Families can potentially stay connected through **virtual home visiting** to reduce community spread of coronavirus. While this is being deployed in a number of states, there are states, communities, and homes where there is no capacity to function in this manner, oftentimes because parents lack technology or the ability to access enough minutes on their phone for a virtual/telehealth visit. **Home visiting is also turning to social media and even texting as a way to keep families engaged and connected with critical resources.**

We've learned that home visitors are working with families struggling during this pandemic crisis to obtain basic items for their infants and young children such as diapers, milk, child care (for parents who are still working), income support (for those who've lost their job), and even transportation to get necessities. There is great anxiety within families right now, many of whom lack resources to effectively navigate stress and chaos, and home visitors have typically been there to discuss coping strategies and offer support services. **In the short term we are hearing about the increased need for training, broadband access/support, virtual home visits, access to technology, basic needs (food, diapers, safe shelter), child care and income supports, etc., and policies that relax HIPPA regulations, limit shut-offs of electricity and heat to consumers, and reduce forced evictions.**

Access to Services & Concrete Supports in time of need. We urge Congress to provide additional and immediate economic relief in the form of increased access to healthcare, direct cash transfers, housing assistance, education support, child care assistance, parenting support, and more in order to protect the health of all children and families in the United States, providing households with some financial stability to weather this time of uncertainty.

In addition, we support access to vital services and programs to strengthen American families, including increasing program benefits that increase access to healthy nutrition for families (both the caregiver and child) through existing programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). With respect to SNAP benefits, we strongly urge increases in benefits for every household enrolled in the program. We also support the immediate provision of emergency cash assistance to families through the TANF and SNAP programs, as well as augmented access to Medicaid and CHIP. Moreover, we strongly advocate for the consideration of significant and flexible emergency funding that will allow child care and Head Start programs to withstand the growing public health and economic crisis and preserve the nation's supply of family child care and community-based child care programs, with particular consideration given to public health workers and other essential personnel.

Immediate infusion of \$60 billion in capital for American charitable nonprofits to maintain operations, expand their scope to address increasing demands, and stabilize losses from closures throughout the country. Specific recommendations for assistance in helping the nonprofit sector stay engaged in serving the American people include: legislation for employment-focused relief or stimulus that apply to tax-exempt organizations through making tax credits and deductions

applicable not just to income taxes, but to the taxes nonprofits pay, such as payroll taxes; provide payroll tax credits to all charities, regardless of size, that provide paid family leave and sick time pay as a result of the coronavirus; incentivize all Americans to support the vital work of America's charities; enact an "above-the-line" or universal charitable deduction for contributions through the end of 2021; and lastly, Congress should permit taxpayers to donate today – at the height of the pandemic – and claim the benefit from these deductions on 2019 tax returns.

As this situation continues to evolve, we know that additional support will be needed for children and families struggling with this crisis. We look forward to continuing to engage with you on how to prioritize the well-being of all of our nation's children.

Sincerely,



Dr. Melissa Merrick
President & CEO
Prevent Child Abuse America

ⁱ Charles Schwab, Modern Wealth Survey (May 2019), Charles Schwab & Co., Inc.

ⁱⁱ National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), *The State of the Earned Income Tax Credit*, *LegisBrief: JAN 2018* | VOL. 26, NO. 3.

<http://www.ncsl.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=UxTWaDvKN7Y%3d&tabid=32022&portalid=1>