

## Rep Davis leads letter to prevent child abuse and neglect

We are writing to urge attention in the economic stimulus package to the importance of protecting vulnerable children from abuse and neglect and supporting parents in a time of economic distress. During times of economic hardship and unemployment, child abuse and neglect rates often rise. Over the years, research reveals that rates of child abuse are higher in areas characterized by unusually high rates of unemployment and that increases in child abuse are preceded by periods of high job loss. The National Research Council has identified unemployment among the stresses associated with child maltreatment in families.

In fact, poverty is the single best predictor of child maltreatment. According to the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect, children from families with incomes below \$15,000 per year are more than 22 times likely to experience abuse or neglect than children living in families with incomes of \$30,000 or more. Most children in the child welfare system are from low-income families. Financial difficulties create parental stress, which contributes to child abuse; lack of finances further results in greater reports of neglect due to the inability of poor families to secure adequate child care. While most poor people do not maltreat their children, poverty - particularly when interacting with other risk factors, including unemployment - increases the likelihood of maltreatment. Particularly in cases of neglect, poverty and unemployment show strong associations with child maltreatment.

December 19, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi,  
Speaker                      The  
Honorable John A. Boehner, Minority Leader

United States House of  
Representatives                      United States  
House of Representatives

Room H-232, The Capitol  
H.O.B.

Room 1011, Longworth

Washington, D.C.  
20515  
20515

Washington, D.C.

The Honorable David R. Obey,  
Chairman           The  
Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member

Committee on Appropriations  
Appropriations

Committee on

United States House of Representatives  
House of Representatives

United States

Room H218, The Capitol  
Longworth H.O.B.

Room 1016,

Washington, D.C.  
20515  
20515

Washington, D.C.

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Boehner, Chairman Obey,  
and Ranking Member Lewis:

We are writing to urge attention in the economic stimulus package to the importance of protecting vulnerable children from abuse and neglect and supporting parents in a time of economic distress. During times of economic hardship and unemployment, child abuse and neglect rates often rise. Over the years, research reveals that rates of child abuse are higher in areas characterized by unusually high rates of unemployment and that increases in child abuse are preceded by periods of high job loss. The National Research Council has identified unemployment among the stresses associated with child

maltreatment in families.

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According to the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect, children from families with incomes below \$15,000 per year are more than 22 times likely to experience abuse or neglect than children living in families with incomes of \$30,000 or more.

Most children in the child welfare system are from low-income families. Financial difficulties create parental stress, which contributes to child abuse; lack of finances further results in greater reports of neglect due to the inability of poor families to secure adequate child care. While most poor people do not maltreat their children, poverty - particularly when interacting with other risk factors, including unemployment - increases the likelihood of maltreatment. Particularly in cases of neglect, poverty and unemployment show strong associations with child maltreatment.

In times of unemployment and economic hardship, families may be forced to choose between paying for heat or food, or they may lose their homes. If they do not have a safety net to fall back on, the children may experience neglect and end up in foster care. The stress that flows from job loss and economic hardship may also push parents over the edge so their behavior becomes harsh, even abusive. Thus, during times of crisis families need additional supports and services to prevent maltreatment from occurring.

We propose that the following initiatives be included in the economic stimulus package to provide financial assistance to states and communities with high levels of unemployment to meet increased demands for child protective services and preventive services to support parents.

1. Increase funding for the Social Services Block Grant. An additional \$1 billion for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), targeted for support of child welfare services, would assist states with significant numbers of unemployed persons in handling greater numbers of cases of child abuse and neglect. These additional SSBG funds would enable states to address infrastructure and staffing needs in child welfare services as well as to provide support directly for a range of additional services that families need in times of crisis. The flexibility of SSBG is one of its strengths for responding to the crisis.

The child protection system, already stretched beyond capacity, requires special attention in times of increased economic hardships with increased demands for services. Even now, the average caseload for child welfare workers is double the recommended level, and obviously much higher in many jurisdictions. We should not fail our children and America's families by failing to invest in a responsive, working child protection system. The SSBG funding would enable state child protective services to expand

post-investigative services for child victims, shorten the time to the delivery of services, and increase services to at-risk families.

2. Increase funding for the

Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grants.

An additional \$100 million for the prevention grants authorized under Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) would help states provide support to the community-based child abuse prevention programs that offer the supportive services needed by parents and families experiencing the stresses of unemployment and economic hardship. Communities across the country have developed preventive services which show success in support programs for new parents, home visitor services, respite and crisis care, parent mutual support, and family support services. These community-based organizations play a critical role in delivering prevention services, but their budgets-often based on charitable donations-are likely to suffer during difficult economic times.

These provisions in the emergency stimulus package would enable states to distribute assistance efficiently and quickly through the already established funding mechanisms of the CAPTA Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grants and the Social Services Block Grants for protecting vulnerable children from abuse and neglect and supporting parents in time of economic hardship.

Thank you for your continuing support of programs to protect children and to prevent child abuse and neglect. We hope we can count on your leadership to promote these increased funding levels for the CAPTA community-based prevention grants and the Social Services Block Grants. We greatly appreciate your commitment to ensuring that vulnerable families and children at risk of abuse or neglect receive support as part of the economic stimulus package, and we thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Danny  
K. Davis

Member  
of Congress

Fortney  
"Pete" Stark

Member  
of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva

Member  
of Congress

Tammy Baldwin

Member  
of Congress

Madeleine  
Z. Bordallo

Member  
of Congress

John  
A. Yarmuth

Member  
of Congress

Barbara  
Lee

Member  
of Congress

Dennis  
Kucinich

Member  
of Congress

Mazie  
K. Hirono

Member  
of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee

Member  
of Congress

Eleanor  
Holmes Norton

Member  
of Congress

Chaka  
Fattah

Member  
of Congress