

**Committee on Education and Labor  
Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities**

**November 5, 2009 10:00am**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and the impact this funding has on service provision locally, statewide and nationally for child victims of abuse. My experiences as a former child welfare caseworker in Pittsburgh, the director of a local Children's Advocacy Center in Harrisburg, PA and as an accreditation site reviewer for the National Children's Alliance have helped to shape my commitment to ensuring children receive what they need to feel safe, cared for and believed. I have also had the privilege of acting as co-chair of the CAPTA workgroup in Pennsylvania and observing firsthand the teamwork and perseverance necessary from state and local government, non-profit agencies and public-private partnerships to meet the requirements necessary to become compliant and eligible under CAPTA.

Pennsylvania, as the 50<sup>th</sup> state to do so, submitted its application and state plan for CAPTA in Spring 2006. Professionals from child-serving agencies and disciplines across the state have been working diligently to meet the requirements and have selected several areas for improvement to Pennsylvania's child welfare response. Although our state is early in this process, great strides have been made that demonstrate the efforts of those committed to providing quality services to child abuse victims and those children at risk of abuse.

**Pennsylvania CAPTA State Plan**

The Pennsylvania CAPTA workgroup has selected several areas for improvement that include:

- Improving legal preparation and representation through the expansion of the Court Improvement project statewide including training for Guardians ad Litem in juvenile dependency matters.
- Enhancing the child protective services system by developing, improving and implementing risk, safety and developmental assessment tools. Skill-based training for child welfare workers, state, public and private agency staff is critical to ensure children at risk are identified and appropriate strategies and actions take place for their safety, health and welfare.
- Developing and facilitating training protocols on mandated reporting to target audiences that have regular and ongoing contact with children such as primary medical providers, schools, hospital staff and first responders.
- Supporting and enhancing collaborations among many child-serving agencies and community-based programs that include comprehensive physical and behavioral health needs of children who are reported to be abused.

These are among just a few initiatives that are in process as Pennsylvania carries out CAPTA requirements for compliance. CAPTA funding has allowed Pennsylvania the opportunity to move forward with the establishment and training of Citizen Review Panels to provide recommendations for systemic change of the child protective services system. Training of healthcare providers to report drug-affected infants has increased opportunities to engage families that might have remained “invisible” in the system thereby improving outcomes for those addicted and their children.

I have had the privilege of conducting more than 70 accreditation site visits for the National Children’s Alliance across the United States over the past 7 years. I have

had the met dedicated professionals, community members and staff members from public and private agencies charged with providing services to child abuse victims and their non-offending family members. Many centers utilize federal funding for child abuse prevention and treatment programs to reach underserved populations and develop public-private partnerships to provide services in creative ways.

### **Children's Advocacy Center Model: A Community Response to Child Abuse**

CAPTA compliance has allowed Pennsylvania to examine its current child welfare system and develop improvements for the benefit of children and families. In addition to child abuse prevention and awareness efforts, CAPTA compliance also allows Pennsylvania the opportunity in the future to increase its impact on providing a coordinated response to child abuse across the state through access to funding from the Criminal Justice Act (CJA).

The Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) model is a collaborative community response that coordinates multidisciplinary partners in the investigation, evaluation and treatment of victims of child abuse. Pennsylvania currently has 9 nationally accredited CACs and 10 centers that have achieved Associate member status with the National Children's Alliance. Thousands of child abuse victims in Pennsylvania have benefited from the collaborative team approach for interviews, medical exams and mental health treatment that CACs provide, yet many more child victims live in communities without an established center. CJA funding will be a welcome resource to assist those communities in developing effective child abuse multidisciplinary teams.

PinnacleHealth Children's Resource Center (CRC), as an accredited CAC, has served a geographic region of more than 20 counties for many years and receives limited

funding designated through the child protective services needs-based budgets from 8 surrounding counties. In 2008, the CRC evaluated 883 children from many counties in Central Pennsylvania. Approximately 52% are referred for services from Dauphin County, a 3<sup>rd</sup> class county. The CRC has seen an increase this year in numbers of children referred for both sexual and physical abuse and an increase in requests to interview siblings of children that have died. Dauphin County has seen a 12.8% increase in numbers of indicated cases of child abuse thus far from last year. In 2008, there were 4 reported child deaths in Dauphin County. In the first 10 months of this year, there have already been 10 child deaths. Prior to 2009, Pennsylvania did not keep statistics of child near deaths, but has kept them this year in compliance with CAPTA. In Dauphin County alone, there have been 8 near fatalities of children, 4 which were indicated cases of abuse. The increase in numbers of reported abuse cases and severity of the abuse inflicted is evident in this community.

CAPTA and CJA provides support for local programs and is essential to continuing the comprehensive quality services provided to child abuse victims in Pennsylvania and throughout the United States. Child abuse prevention efforts as well as coordinated interventions are imperative to providing a safe environment for children, families and the communities in which they live.