



August 27, 2014

Dr. David Sanders  
Chairman  
Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse Neglect Fatalities  
1800 F St., NW, Room 7003D  
Washington, DC 20006

Chairman Sanders and Members of the Commission:

Every day, nearly 8 children die from abuse and neglect. Recognizing that these tragic deaths are preventable, we, the members of the National Coalition to End Child Abuse Deaths<sup>1</sup>, have been working since 2010 to raise awareness of the problem and to encourage bipartisan policy solutions.

We are excited the Commission is tasked with developing a comprehensive national strategy to combat the tragedy of child abuse fatalities. Rather than a piecemeal approach to preventing these deaths, children at risk of imminent harm need and require the government's protection. Fatal child abuse is preventable, and as a public health problem, can be approached in a thoughtful and analytical manner, much as the US has successfully combated other public health threats.

We are encouraged by the actions already taken by the Commission because, in many ways, opening a national conversation on child abuse fatalities through CECANF mirrors and strengthens the process by which States review child deaths to strengthen their own prevention efforts.

Reducing child abuse fatalities, particularly those involving prior contact with the child welfare system, is a complex matter. Thus, we encourage the Commission to investigate and address issues such as:

- Building upon the best of current child protection systems and evidence-supported prevention and intervention efforts, to develop a national strategy to end maltreatment deaths, including public health and social services aimed at strengthening families and preventing maltreatment in the first place;
- Workforce training, caseload, and risk assessment practice within child protective services so that at-risk children may be identified to prevent fatal or near-fatal risk of harm;

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<sup>1</sup> The National Coalition to End Child Abuse Deaths is comprised of member organizations: Every Child Matters, the National Association of Social Workers, the National District Attorneys Association, the National Children's Alliance, and the National Center for the Review and Prevention of Child Deaths.


- Better protecting children at risk of imminent harm, by encouraging Children's Advocacy Centers to expand their services to include severe physical abuse and neglect cases so that the child abuse experts represented on their multidisciplinary team can ensure close coordination of criminal legal proceedings and civil child protection systems, as well as medical care and mental healthcare for child victims;
- Strengthening the medical examiner and coroner system within the US to ensure proper and accurate designations of cause of death in child abuse fatalities, which are often among the most medically complex;
- Providing training to law enforcement and prosecutors to thoroughly investigate and prosecute cases of fatal and near-fatal abuse in order to hold offenders accountable;
- Creating data-sharing systems that allow agencies to cross-share information about near-fatalities and fatalities so that children can be saved and research can inform our practice;
- Expanding federal support for and targeting the implementation of effective primary prevention programs, such as home visiting, to families at higher risk for maltreatment related injuries and deaths;
- Establishing a national system to improve the public health surveillance of maltreatment fatalities;
- Enabling the public, through tested public education campaigns, to identify and report child abuse and neglect, thereby engaging communities in protecting their own children.<sup>2</sup>

Child abuse and neglect fatalities are preventable tragedies. And, our efforts on behalf of these children must go beyond finger-pointing, the blaming and firing of individual caseworkers, and scattered prevention and intervention strategies if we are to reform child protection systems in a way that prevents future deaths. We believe a national strategy to end child abuse fatalities is not only the best approach, but is critically needed in this country. And, your work on the CECANF will allow for just that.

Sincerely,

  
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 Teresa Huizar  
 Executive Director  
 National Children's Alliance

  
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 Angelo McClain, PhD, LICSW  
 Chief Executive Officer  
 National Association of Social Workers

  
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<sup>2</sup> 12 We Can Do Better, "Child Abuse and Neglect Deaths in America", 3rd Edition, 2012.