

The Honorable Robert Casey
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

As representatives of organizations committed to improving the health and wellbeing of our nation's children and families, we are writing to thank you for your leadership on and continued attention to the needs of America's children, and to express our support for the *Speak Up to Protect Every Abused Kid Act of 2014*. We believe this legislation takes an important step by increasing existing protections for children victimized by abuse or neglect by requiring certain professionals working closely with children to report known or suspected child abuse and neglect to law enforcement or child protection authorities, and by providing grants to states to carry out educational campaigns and provide evidence-based or evidence-informed training on State laws for mandatory reporting of incidents of child abuse or neglect.

While current federal law requires states to establish mandatory reporting laws, it does not delineate who is responsible for reporting abuse and neglect. This bill specifies that individuals working in professional or volunteer capacities directly with children, including health professionals and school employees, must report incidences and suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. It also gives states the discretion to identify other individuals as mandatory reporters. By strengthening reporting requirements and expanding the provision of victim services to all abused children, the bill will help ensure law enforcement and child protection agencies are appropriately notified and called upon to act when reports are made.

Importantly, the bill provides grants for states to carry out educational and training campaigns and requires that guidance and information on best practices be developed and disseminated by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These efforts will support reporters in efforts to better understand what constitutes child abuse and neglect, how to report incidences or suspected incidences and what resources are available for prevention efforts. *The Speak Up Act* also takes an important step in establishing coordination between states to ensure that abused children do not fall through the cracks because of multi-jurisdictional issues. States will be required to investigate reports of child abuse or neglect when alleged incidences occurred in their states even if the child and/or alleged perpetrator resides in a different state. States leading these investigations must share their findings with states where children and alleged perpetrators reside, and these states

of residence must develop plans to assist states that have primary responsibility for these multi-jurisdictional investigations.

The bill also requires states within four years to report on implementation efforts regarding their mandatory reporting laws, activities undertaken to improve reporting and, most importantly, efforts to appropriately respond to reports of abuse and neglect. In addition, a state task force will also evaluate the State's efforts to train individuals on reporting protocols. This will allow for the opportunity to assess the reporting efforts and to improve these activities based on the information collected.

Thank you for your leadership in introducing *The Speak Up to Protect Every Abused Kid Act*, for encouraging all states to institute strong reporting requirements, and for all your efforts to improve the health and well-being of our nation's children.

Sincerely,

Adopt America Network

Advocates for Children and Youth (Maryland)

Alaska Children's Trust

Allies for Children (Pennsylvania)

Brighter Beginnings (California)

Children Awaiting Parents

Children First for Oregon

Children's Action Alliance (Arizona)

Community Action Partnership

Family Design Resources, Inc. (Pennsylvania)

First Focus Campaign for Children

Foster Family-Based Treatment Association (New Jersey)

Human Rights Initiative of North Texas

Kentucky Youth Advocates

Lycoming County Children and Youth (Pennsylvania)

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Children's Alliance

North American Council on Adoptable Children

Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Prevent Child Abuse Hawaii

Prosperity Works (New Mexico)

Texans Care for Children

The Ray E. Helfer Society

Three Rivers Adoption Council (Pennsylvania)

Voice for Adoption

Voices for Children in Nebraska

Voices for Utah Children

Voices for Virginia's Children

WI Council on Children and Families

Youth Villages, Inc.