



Opening Statement

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott • Chairman

Opening Statement of Chair Suzanne Bonamici (OR-1)

Subcommittee on Civil Rights & Human Services Protections Hearing
Strengthening Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect
2175 Rayburn House Office Building
Tuesday, March 26, 2019 | 2:00pm

We are here today to discuss our responsibility to protect the health and safety of our nation's children.

Child abuse and neglect, collectively child maltreatment, are quiet, nationwide tragedies that unfold every day in communities across the country. In 2017, state child protection services agencies received a total of 4.1 million referrals of possible child abuse or neglect involving 7.5 million children. Altogether, child maltreatment affects as many as one in seven children.

Victims of child maltreatment typically suffer both immediate and lasting harm. In the short-term, maltreatment can result in significant physical injuries, in addition to emotional and psychological disruption. And the effects can last over a lifetime. Emotional and psychological abuse can hinder not only social growth but also the physical growth of the brain, itself.

As adults, victims of child maltreatment can suffer from inhibited memory processing and struggle to control their emotions and behaviors. As a result, they are seven percent more likely to drop out of high school and *nine times* more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system than their peers. The trauma suffered by these children and families will stay with them for a lifetime, and in Congress we should always look for ways to support trauma-informed care.

In addition to the high personal costs, child maltreatment also carries devastating societal costs. Research shows that the long-term effects can have lifetime costs of more than \$800,000 per child. Altogether, this public health crisis costs more than \$400 billion each year.

Since the passage of the *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, or CAPTA*, more than three decades ago, we have made progress toward reducing cases of child maltreatment. In fact, from 1990 to 2009, rates steadily declined, and then plateaued through 2012.

Despite that, we face new challenges in our efforts to address child maltreatment. Since 2013, the rate at which children are abused and neglected has steadily increased. And with it, tragically, the rate of child deaths has also gone up. In the year 2017, child deaths from maltreatment reached an all-time high—1,720 children lost their lives.

Evidence suggests that the opioid crisis is giving rise to new challenges in protecting vulnerable children.

In my home state of Oregon, I have met with parents, health care professionals, community leaders, veterans, and people from all walks of life who have shared heart-wrenching stories about how the opioid crisis is taking lives and inflicting pain on families. This crisis can be particularly devastating for mothers and newborn children.

As our understanding of child abuse and neglect deepens, we must update our approach accordingly.

We cannot continue to address this public health crisis by just *reacting* after child maltreatment cases arise. As this Committee considers reauthorizing the *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act*—last updated nearly a decade ago—we must shift our focus to *preventing* the maltreatment from occurring in the first place.

We need a CAPTA reauthorization that strengthens federal investments in community-based prevention services so families across the country can receive help before children suffer.

We need to build networks of wrap-around services that lower the risk of child maltreatment by helping families navigate complex health, educational, and financial hardships.

And we need to streamline communication between and among states so child protection agencies across the country can connect the dots and prevent cases of child maltreatment, no matter where they occur, from slipping through the cracks.

All of us in this room recognize that Congress has a responsibility to protect children. We must work together to invest in services that prevent, not just treat, child abuse and neglect.

Today's hearing is an important step toward making sure that all children grow up in a safe and healthy environment that allows them to reach their full potential.

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