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May 9, 2019

Chairman Bobby Scott
House Committee on Education and Labor
1201 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Virginia Foxx
House Committee on Education and Labor
2462 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Kim Schrier
1123 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative James Comer
1037 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, Representative Schrier, and Representative Comer:

On behalf of the nearly 118,4000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), thank you for your extraordinary leadership on H.R. 2480, the Stronger Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Stronger CAPTA). The reforms in this legislation, in concert with the increased funding authorization, are powerful steps toward preventing child abuse and neglect and improving access to treatment and essential services for children and families, especially those recovering from trauma.

APA is a scientific and professional organization representing psychology, comprised of clinicians, researchers, educators, consultants and students across the United States and around the world. APA works to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives. Many psychologists are specialized in child development and work across research and practice to serve children and families, including children who have experienced abuse and neglect.

The Stronger Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act takes a streamlined and family-oriented approach to addressing key priorities in child welfare. The bill thoroughly emphasizes the importance of strengthening families through a continuum of services and supports including treating traumatic stress, connecting parents and children to mental and physical health services, programs to develop parenting skills, and other core services. Building on the Family First Prevention Services Act, the new Stronger CAPTA includes a greater focus on the prevention of child abuse and neglect. APA is particularly pleased to see trauma and adverse childhood experiences highlighted across the bill's, research and technical assistance components, as well as the state grants in both Titles I and II. While there is much to be commended in the proposal, APA strongly supports the following elements:

Improvements in Research and Data Collection

The priorities set in section 104 focus on key areas of research to identify evidence-based approaches that improve primary prevention efforts, service delivery to children and families, and the wellbeing of victims of child abuse and neglect. The bill emphasizes scalability with an eye toward better serving more children and families, particularly those who have experienced trauma or have complex needs. APA strongly supports the promotion of racial equity within the child welfare system and the development of evidence-based approaches that consider the unique needs of rural, urban, and suburban families. In addition to streamlining research priorities, Stronger CAPTA enables much needed improvements in transparency and state data reporting through an update to the state plan mandates in section 106.

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Reducing Findings of Neglect Due to Poverty

Consistent with APA's Presidential Initiative on Deep Poverty, APA applauds the new provisions aimed at preventing and reducing findings of child neglect that result from a family's economic insecurity. Keeping families together, whenever possible, is critically important for healthy development and children should not be separated from loving families due to poverty. As the section 106 grants suggest, families in financial need are better served by connecting them to services, such as nutrition assistance benefits.

Addressing Complex Family Needs

Stronger CAPTA recognizes the challenges of adequately supporting and improving outcomes for families with complex needs. Some of America's most vulnerable families are those with multiple risk factors for child abuse and neglect, such as parents with substance use disorders, parents who have experienced domestic violence, caregivers and children with disabilities, and young parents. Across both Titles, the bill encourages comprehensive outreach and treatment strategies to identify and support families with complex needs.

Substance Use Disorders

The national epidemic of opioid use disorders has driven a substantial increase in findings of child abuse and neglect that has resulted in more children in the child welfare system. This bill acknowledges the intersection of substance use disorders and child maltreatment and incorporates new provisions to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration across community and public partners, with the goal of ensuring families are connected to the mental health services and additional supports that they need. These reforms reflect a responsiveness to current needs identified by state and local agencies and service providers.

Increased authorization levels

Congress has long sought myriad improvements to CAPTA but has historically failed to appropriate adequate funds for proper implementation. Additional funding is vital to ensure that the meaningful reforms of this legislation are fully realized, to the benefit of vulnerable children and families. The significant increases to authorization levels in H.R. 2480 illustrate a renewed commitment protecting children from harm. The importance of the increases proposed cannot be overstated, and the changes must be incorporated into the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations legislation accordingly, so as to not risk delays in implementation.

The Stronger Child Abuse and Prevention and Treatment Act represents an encouraging federal commitment to preventing child abuse and neglect before it occurs and proving the best possible continuum of services to support to children and families who have experienced child abuse and neglect. We welcome opportunities to work together to strengthen and advance this legislation. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Cynthia Whitney (cmalley@apa.org) or 202-336-6182 in our Government Relations Office.

Sincerely,

Katherine McGuire
Chief Advocacy Officer

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