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ORGANIZATIONAL SIGN-ON

December 10, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John A. Boehner
Minority Leader
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Reid, Senator McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Congressman Boehner:

As representatives of organizations committed to improving the health and well-being of America's children and families, we are writing to urge your support for the inclusion of a temporary increase to the Federal Financial Participation (FFP) for Title IV-E (Federal Payments for Foster Care and Adoption Assistance) of the Social Security Act as part of a second economic stimulus package. In addition, we urge your support for increases to the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) and community-based child abuse prevention programs funded through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) to be included in the same stimulus legislation.

We expect that a second economic stimulus package will include an increase in the FMAP for Medicaid. This increase would automatically trigger an increase in the FFP for Title IV-E unless Congress specifically de-links the two. In drafting the stimulus bill, we urge you not to de-link abused and neglected children. During an economic recession, children are more vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Yet at the same time, states face declining resources to care for these children in need. We believe that a temporary increase to the FFP to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act would provide significant fiscal relief to states, in concert with a Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) increase to Medicaid. Congress should include the automatic increase in the FFP for states in any economic stimulus package it considers. This assistance is vital in helping states meet the needs of children and families during a recession.

As you know, Title IV-E is a federal program administered by state and local public child welfare agencies that provides assistance to vulnerable children and youth. Specifically, Title IV-E provides foster care maintenance payments to states on behalf of each child who has been removed from the home, as well as adoption assistance and incentives payments, and reimbursement for administrative and training expenses. Title IV-E also includes the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. At present, states are struggling to balance budgets and programs for vulnerable children and families are facing cuts.

According to the Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, 41 states faced or are facing budget shortfalls for this year and/or next year, and to date, at least 25 states have enacted budget cuts to critical services, including public health programs, programs for the elderly and disabled, k-12 education, colleges and universities, state workforce, and child welfare services. To date, states including Connecticut, Illinois, Ohio and Maryland have ordered budget cuts to child welfare programs. It is critical that as we navigate the current economic downturn, we ensure better care for our most vulnerable children by continuing to invest in our child welfare system.

Congress should also help the most distressed states provide additional prevention and early intervention services, as well as child protection services, by increasing SSBG and funds that go to community-based child abuse prevention programs through CAPTA as part of an economic recovery strategy and state fiscal relief. Specifically, states that are struggling with significant job loss and unemployment should receive additional SSBG funds to provide such services. In addition, community-based organizations receiving CAPTA funds play a critical role in delivering prevention services, but their budgets—often based on charitable donations—are likely to suffer in difficult economic times.

As the economy weakens and state and local revenues dwindle, the need for public programs increases. The federal government can help by providing states with assistance in the form of additional emergency funding for child welfare services as part of an economic recovery strategy. Doing so will help states maintain essential child welfare programs and services, as well as ensure that states are not forced to make additional cuts to desperately needed services. While a FFP adjustment for Title IV-E and increases to SSBG and CAPTA would amount to a small investment, these funds would be of enormous help in caring for abused and neglected children.

As organizations that seek to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families, we are grateful for your leadership and we look forward to working with you to include additional funding for Title IV-E, SSBG and CAPTA in an economic stimulus package this year.

Sincerely,