



A collective vision and voice dedicated to preventing child abuse and the victimization of children

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Dear Member of the Pennsylvania General Assembly:

We are deeply distressed that Congress has failed to enact a temporary extension of the enhanced federal Medicaid match rate (FMAP).

Our distress is heightened by indications from the Rendell Administration and bipartisan lawmakers that without the nearly \$850 million in extended enhanced FMAP funds alarming reductions would be required in public and private services and staffing dedicated to the prevention, investigation and treatment of child abuse, domestic and sexual violence services, and other services fundamental to strengthening families and keeping children safe at home.

Given the inability, to date, of Congress to enact an FMAP extension, we are calling on you to assure that the state budget being negotiated seeks to aggressively minimize the ripple effect – human and economic – resulting from any continued failed effort on FMAP.

Central to this strategy will be a balanced approach to the state budget – an approach that wisely seeks to offset the FMAP loss and resulting public/private sector job losses with the need to raise revenue.

We fully appreciate that the Great Recession undermined the financial well-being of the Commonwealth and of families all across the state. In fact we have been on the front lines of this economic crisis.

We have been the advocates, professionals and agencies - even within our own budget constraints and reduced staffing – that have been asked to pick up the pieces. We've been there when economic strain and high unemployment have fractured a family, when a child has been physically and emotionally injured from abuse, a mom is trying to be a capable parent but can't connect to or afford critical drug and alcohol or mental health services, and we have provided the respite or shelter that have provided a lifeline to women and children fleeing abuse.

In April, the Governor illustrated cuts that would require consideration without the FMAP extension – cuts that included: a twenty-five percent reduction in child welfare services, fifty percent reduction in domestic and sexual violence services as well as elimination of drug and alcohol and homeless services.

Any cuts, but particularly those of this magnitude, would come on top of a pattern of reduced or level funding that has not kept pace either with increased costs or dramatic increased demands for services. It also would arrive at a time of identified existing complications in the state's efforts to protect Pennsylvania's children (i.e. the state's child abuse hotline is operating with so few staff that somewhere between nine and thirteen percent of all calls to the hotline are being "abandoned," a \$1.8 million cut to Nurse Family Partnership in the current year budget, a spike in domestic violence homicides, etc).

Beyond adopting a balanced approach to the state budget we would also urge a holistic understanding of the needs of children and families.

Far too often children are engaged in our child welfare system because of unstable housing or a parent's inability to access D&A services or other support services that help to build their confidence and competence as a parent. Therefore, it is critical that budget choices connect the dots (i.e. recognition that a cut or elimination of drug and alcohol

services or supports for stable housing directly impacts not just the risk for children but also the costs for the child welfare system).

We are confident that even in these stunning times of fiscal insecurity for the Commonwealth and its families you will do all you can to elevate the prevention of child abuse and the strengthening of families by adopting a balanced approach to the state budget. We look forward to a continued partnership with you in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

A Child's Place at Mercy

Mary Carrasco, MD., Director

A Voice For Me, Child Advocacy Center*

Jennifer Lytton

A Way Out

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Women's Law Project

Carol Tracy, Executive Director

Women's Resource Center

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YWCA / Wise Options

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*Added after initial distribution