



National Children's Alliance
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April 29, 2016

The Honorable Joseph Vitale, Chair
The Honorable Fred H. Madden, Vice Chair
Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee

Dear Chair Vitale, Vice Chair Madden, and Members of the Committees,

On behalf of National Children's Alliance, the New Jersey Children's Alliance, and the 11 New Jersey Children's Advocacy Centers serving victims of child abuse and child sex trafficking, I would like to express my complete support for S.972, a bill to establish a Child Advocacy Center-Multidisciplinary Team Advisory Board and certification program for Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) and Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs). Creating a CAC - MDT advisory board and certification program will not only ensure that victims of child abuse in New Jersey receive justice, but also receive key services needed to heal. In addition, S.972 creates a dedicated funding stream specifically for the development and expansion of CACs in New Jersey, including the 12 New Jersey counties with no access to a CAC. These resources are critical, and thus I wholeheartedly support S.972 and urge the bill's swift passage.

National Children's Alliance is the member-accrediting body for Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). CACs are child-focused facilities in which multidisciplinary teams of law enforcement, child protective services, prosecutors, medical professionals, mental healthcare providers, and victim advocates coordinate their efforts to investigate and treat child abuse, while also holding offenders accountable. These centers use evidence-based best practices through forensic interviews, medical evaluations, trauma-focused mental healthcare and victim advocacy for victims of child abuse and child sexual exploitation. Making a child whole again is the number one priority for all CACs; however, it is also important to note that cases brought to CACs also save local communities \$1000 per investigation. Last year, CACs in New Jersey served more than 2,500 children, meaning CACs saved New Jersey communities more than \$2.6 million.

Because CACs have been on the front lines in intervening and preventing child abuse and child exploitation for almost 30 years, we believe that a bill like S.972 is needed to expand CAC access. Sadly, no law will ever completely eliminate the crime of child abuse; but establishing a CAC-MDT advisory board and a dedicated funding stream for New Jersey CACs will ensure abused children have the best chance to heal.

Child abuse is a far too common experience for America's children. And, child abuse is preventable. It is for this reason that we support S.972 and urge swift passage.

Sincerely,

Teresa Huizar
Executive Director
National Children's Alliance