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Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr,

The Children's Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law is writing in response to the Senate's introduction of CAPTA Reauthorization and the Manager's Amendment introduced today. As you know, we have advocated persistently for decades to advance a stronger CAPTA which is properly funded and enforced, and better aligned with children's need for due process, protection of their legal interests, and ending the tragic national scourge of child abuse and neglect fatalities and near fatalities. CAI is grateful to have been called upon to provide TA and feedback around the provisions in CAPTA pertaining to the legal representation of children as well as the prevention of child abuse and neglect fatalities and near-fatalities.

We applaud and enthusiastically support the new provisions ensuring that children, parents, and youth in extended foster care be provided with legal representation for the duration of their child welfare cases. This is a critical, appropriate and timely step towards protecting the fundamental rights of children and parents to family integrity and assuring the civil and due process rights of children. Furthermore, it serves to rectify a cumulative muddling of roles in the GAL provision over the years and returns CAPTA to its original intent in recognizing the distinct yet complimentary roles played by non-attorney GALs and children's attorneys.

We note with appreciation and hope the new Title III of the Act and the incorporation of many of our recommendations to strengthen and clarify fatality disclosure provisions in CAPTA, narrow the exceptions to disclosure, and bring important language in the Child Welfare Policy Manual into statute. In addition, we recognize important new provisions to improve information sharing, cross-system collaboration, and provisions to focus responses to the highest risk children. These changes will all help to make our child protection system more effective, more efficient, and more just.

We look forward to continued collaboration to ensure that CAPTA advances through negotiations with the House and Appropriations in a manner that will maximize its potential to serve children and families, and through Appropriations in a manner which critically aligns the statute's provisions with the funding needed to properly implement and enforce it.

Sincerely,

Amy Harfeld, National Policy Director, Children's Advocacy Institute