



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 31, 2018

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First Progress Report on Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities Shows Improvement in Child Welfare Practices Nationwide

Report describes “decisive action” at county and state levels to reduce child fatalities

WASHINGTON, D.C. – In the first assessment of progress made implementing the recommendations of the federal Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities (CECANF), a new report finds a groundswell of recent reforms in child welfare practices across the country. The report, *Steps Forward*, published by the Within Our Reach office at the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, and the Children’s Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law found dozens of changes in policy and law directly reflecting the recommendations put forth by the Commission in a comprehensive March 2016 report presented to Congress.

The full report and detailed descriptions of activities occurring at the national, state and local level are available at www.within-our-reach.org. Persons can also go to this site to provide information on their implementation activities

The Commission’s final report, *Within Our Reach*, provided a blueprint for changes in federal, state and local policy and law as well as 114 recommendations set within a public health framework that, if implemented, would catalyze the transformation of our child welfare systems into a 21st century model focused not only on child safety but on the prevention of maltreatment at a multi-systems level.

“The progress tracked in *Steps Forward* represents an encouraging initial phase of work,” said Teri Covington, a former Commissioner and Director of the Within Our Reach office. “Our hope is that this first progress report will serve to recognize and demonstrate the extent of meaningful action that has taken place since the release of *Within Our Reach* and provide momentum for further action.”

Composed of 12 members appointed by the President and Congress, the bipartisan Commission began its work in 2014 to thoroughly investigate the causes of, and identify solutions to, the national scourge of child abuse and neglect fatalities which result in the deaths of thousands of children each year - most of them babies and toddlers. The Commission held public hearings across the country and listened to national experts, government leaders and those on the front lines of child safety and health. At the conclusion of their two-year tenure, Commissioners proposed a sweeping set of recommendations.

“The extent of this impressive wave of activity has illustrated the deep commitment of professionals and policymakers around the country to prioritize the safety and survival of our nation’s most vulnerable children,” said Amy Harfeld of the Children’s Advocacy Institute. “It’s also confirmation that the Commission’s strategic recommendations were deemed credible and prudent by states looking for solutions. There is now a wide spectrum of models that can be replicated and built upon by other jurisdictions looking to take action.”

Key Findings Include:

State and Local Level

Every state has engaged in at least one action or activity that reflects or is consistent with one or more of the Commission’s 114 recommendations and together with a number of cities, counties, and regions are developing major innovations. In total, this report identified approximately 180 child maltreatment fatality prevention efforts now occurring at the state and county levels, each reflecting one or more of the Commission’s recommendations.

Examples range from a focus on improving child safety - e.g. adopting predictive analytics models to better identify children at high risk for harm, changes to child protective services screening policies to ensure that all reports involving infants are immediately investigated, and improvements to mandatory reporting - to the development of local and statewide strategic plans that aim to address the root causes of maltreatment and work towards prevention efforts that strengthen families.

National and Federal Level

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a formal response to the Commission report stating that HHS is working to advance 61% of the recommendations applicable to them, including support for home visiting, addressing disproportionality and leadership in interagency coordination of child maltreatment prevention efforts.

Since the release of *Within Our Reach*, Congress has enacted two pieces of legislation that relate to the CECANF recommendations:

- **The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA)** is the most comprehensive effort yet to address the current opioid epidemic that is taking such a toll on the well-being and safety of children. Adopted within CARA, the Infant Plan of Safe Care Act amends the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) to require states to better comply with federal law and enact certain guidelines for the welfare of children exposed to opioids.
- **Talia’s Law** requires mandated reporters within the Department of Defense (DOD) to report known or suspected child maltreatment to state child protective service agencies in addition to the regular federal DOD chain of command, breaking down information silos that were not serving the safety of children.

The Next Steps report also highlights efforts underway in numerous national organizations to support implementation of the recommendations to their constituencies and through inter-agency and partnership activities.

“The Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities had a once-in-a-generation opportunity to identify the steps needed to keep children safe and save their

lives,” said Professor Robert C. Fellmeth, founder and Executive Director of the Children’s Advocacy Institute and Price Professor of Public Interest Law at the University of San Diego School of Law. “Let us commit to building on these early steps forward and create a future where no more children in this country die from child abuse and neglect.”

The Within Our Reach office is continuing efforts to promote national, state and local action on the Commission recommendations and is partnering with states to provide technical assistance in their efforts to transform their child health and safety systems to better support families, reduce risks and prevent fatalities.

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The Children’s Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law, works to improve the health, safety, and well-being of children, especially those living in, at risk of entering, or preparing to transition out of foster care. In addition to its academic component, CAI engages in regulatory and legislative advocacy, impact litigation and public education in order to ensure that children’s interests are represented effectively whenever and wherever government makes policy and budget decisions that will impact them. Visit <http://www.caichildlaw.org> for more information.

The Within Our Reach Office, housed at the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, is an initiative funded by Casey Family Programs working to advance and track the recommendations from the Commission’s report at the national, state and local level. **The Alliance for Strong Families and Communities (Alliance)** is a strategic action network of thousands of committed social sector leaders who through their excellence, distinction, and influence are working to achieve a healthy and equitable society. The Alliance aggregates the very best sector knowledge and serves as an incubator for learning and innovation to generate new solutions to the toughest problems. It accelerates change through dynamic leadership development and collective actions to ensure policies and systems provide equal access and opportunity for all people in our nation to reach their fullest potential through improvements in health and well-being, educational success, economic opportunity, and safety and security. Go to alliance1.org for more information.