

*House Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities*

Hearing on "Preventing Child Abuse and Improving Responses to Families in Crisis"

*Opening Statement of Ranking Member Todd Russell Platts
November 5, 2009*

Good morning. I would like to welcome you all to our hearing today.

Today we will examine ways to prevent child abuse and improve responses to families in crisis. As we all know, child abuse comes in many different forms. Child abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional in nature, and occurs in all segments of our population, crossing ethnic, racial, and even economic lines in some cases.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, each year more than 2.5 million cases of child abuse and neglect are reported. Recent studies show that twenty-five percent of girls and one in eight boys will be sexually abused before they reach eighteen years of age. We know that these children suffer both short and long-term physical and emotional damage. Many children become depressed well into adulthood. Others become violent, and even suicidal. Children who are abused are at a higher risk of abusing drugs and alcohol.

Congress has made progress on this issue over the last several decades with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), first passed in 1974. This legislation provides minimum standards that states must incorporate in their statutory definitions of child abuse and neglect. CAPTA defines child abuse and neglect as, "any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure

to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm." The last authorization of CAPTA in 2003 focused on three major goals: preventing child abuse and family violence before it occurs; maintaining local projects with demonstrated value in eliminating barriers to permanent adoption; and addressing the circumstances that lead to child abandonment.

We will hear today from several experts on the successful prevention and treatment of child abuse. For example, the Differential Response System has received bipartisan support and demonstrated effectiveness with its approach that allows child protective services to respond differently to confirmed reports of child abuse and neglect. Child protective services take into consideration the type and severity of abuse reported, number of sources of reports and willingness of the family to participate. Results have shown a reduction in investigations, repeated reports of maltreatment, court involvement, child in-placements, while at the same time increasing family involvement and the number of children served.

Despite the considerable work that has been done on this issue at both the federal and local level, child abuse is still on the rise. As such, we must continue to explore innovative ways to prevent child abuse in our communities. Teresa Smith, Coordinator and Executive Director of the Pinnacle Health Children's Resource Center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, has joined with us today. Currently the Co-Chair of the Pennsylvania CAPTA Workgroup, I am grateful for her sharing with us the importance of implementing CAPTA in states nationwide, including Pennsylvania.

I look forward to hearing the testimony from all of our witnesses today. As we move toward the reauthorization of CAPTA, we must take into consideration the current trends in

child abuse and neglect and remain focused on prevention at the local level. Thank you, Chairwoman McCarthy.