

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative DeLauro and Representative Bilirakis:

As organizations interested in the wellbeing of young children and their families, we write in support of the Strengthening America's Families Act (SAFA) as legislation that applies the science of early childhood development to meeting the urgent needs of infants and toddlers and bolstering their families' ability to nurture them. By funding state infant-toddler court programs, the bill would give states the tools to transform child welfare services for infants and toddlers from a one-size-fits all approach that is not responsive to the developmental needs of infants and toddlers or the complex needs of their parents, to one of strengthening families and supporting positive early development. SAFA also would build collaboration and capacity at the local level, using courts, child welfare, and community leadership to create integrated approaches to family support as well as infrastructure to implement a continuum of evidence-based practices for prevention and child welfare services.

As you know, infants experience maltreatment at 300-400 percent the rate of other age groups and more than one-third of children entering foster care are under the age of three. Their rapid brain development makes them particularly vulnerable to the effects of maltreatment and child welfare practices do not take into account their need for stability and close, trusting relationships. Frequently, parents of infants and toddlers have experienced significant trauma in the course of their own lives, however little attention is given to helping them heal and supporting them in their parenting role.

The programs SAFA addresses generational trauma by creating an emphasis on parents' needs as a starting point for building strong families, as well as ensuring babies have access to appropriate health and appropriate developmental supports they need to thrive. SAFA builds on a proven collaborative approach working with family court judges and community-based partners to provide families the tools they need to prevent child abuse and neglect and nurture their children. For example, as a part of the SAFA model, parents are able to promptly receive services such as substance use disorder and mental health treatment and children receive developmental screening as well as infant and early childhood mental health services as needed. As a result, in localities that use this model, repeated maltreatment has occurred in fewer than one percent of cases.

We are particularly encouraged by the priority for the infant-toddler court program to develop strong community services that will support parents with their needs and prevent maltreatment and unnecessary contact with the child welfare system. We also note that research on infant-toddler court teams has found no disparities in outcomes for children of color and their families once they enter the program, an important element in addressing the inequities that permeate the child welfare system.

We applaud you for filling a gap in child and family services. Few interventions or approaches are available to address the needs of babies in the child welfare system, whose lives are forever changed by their early adverse experiences. We appreciate your efforts with this legislation to expand the reach of

this critical approach to ensuring infants, toddlers, and their families are surrounded by the care they need to grow strong.

Sincerely,

American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children Inc (APSAC)  
Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice  
Center for the Study of Social Policy  
Central Healthy Start  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children's Defense Fund  
Children's Defense Fund-Ohio  
Children's Home & Aid  
Chipola Healthy Start, Inc.  
Florida Association of Healthy Start Coalitions  
Florida State University Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy  
Groundwork Ohio  
Healthy Start  
Healthy Start Coalition of Manatee County, Inc.  
Healthy Start Coalition of Okaloosa and Walton Counties  
Healthy Start Coalition of Pinellas, Inc.  
Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands and Polk Counties, Inc.  
Healthy Start of North Central Florida Coalition  
Indian River County Healthy Start  
Lynn Tepper, Circuit Judge, Retired, 6th Judicial Circuit of Florida  
Michigan's Children  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of Counsel for Children  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges  
National Family Support Network  
Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition, Inc.  
Our Children Oregon  
Prenatal and Infant Healthcare Coalition of Brevard County, Inc.  
Prevent Child Abuse Oregon  
ZERO TO THREE