



COMMISSION TO ELIMINATE
CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT FATALITIES

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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

Federal Commission Begins Deliberating in Effort to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities

Burlington, Vermont - The Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities (CECANF) began deliberations today in Burlington, Vermont in advance of issuing a report to President Obama and Congress on a national strategy to eliminate child abuse and neglect fatalities. The meeting took place one day after the Commission heard from local, state and tribal stakeholders from the Burlington, Vermont region.

The Commissioners met as a body for the first time to begin deliberating on key questions related to how federal, state, and local governments define and count child abuse fatalities. Some of the key questions they reviewed include:

- What are the purposes of counting child abuse and neglect fatalities?
- What data on child abuse and neglect fatalities are currently collected?
- What are the limitations and economic impact of our current data collection efforts?
- What strategies could be implemented to improve the counting of child abuse and neglect fatalities?
- Does defining child abuse and neglect fatalities need to be standardized?

According to Dr. David Sanders, Chairman of the Commission, “We are beginning our deliberation process with a focus on counting, because we all agree that we cannot solve a problem this complex until we agree it exists. And that begins by defining exactly what constitutes a child abuse or neglect fatality. When we understand how these deaths occur, we can develop more effective strategies to prevent them. It is not enough to agree that a death occurred. Information about the circumstances around that death shows us which risk factors were present. These risk factors can then be used, in conjunction with real-time data, to identify other children who are at increased risk of harm—and to prevent future deaths by offering timely services to their families or moving the children to a safe environment.

Commissioner Teri Covington summarized the data that the Commission has received to date on how to quantify child abuse and neglect fatalities. “It is estimated that the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), which defines cases of child abuse and neglect based on state-specific statutes, currently undercounts the number of fatalities by as much as fifty percent, according to numerous studies,” she noted. “There is little consistency in which fatalities are being counted, which affects both the validity and reliability of the current system. Our challenge is to identify ways not just to more accurately count fatalities, but to verify data through multiple sources and a multi-disciplinary approach that is standardized across states and localities.”

The Commission discussed the contention that while most instances of “physical abuse” were readily identifiable, it was the category of “neglect” deaths that was more difficult to define and classify. They also discussed the recommendation suggested by many experts and stakeholders who presented to the Commission that the development of uniform, operational definitions for child maltreatment fatalities based on a public health model would be an important step to more accurately counting those deaths. They concluded their initial day of deliberations with a focus on the issue of confidentiality and the challenges it presents to a more cohesive system of data sharing.

CECANF was established by Public Law 112-275 (112th Congress), the Protect Our Kids Act of 2012, and has spent the past six months gathering detailed information and insight related to federal policy, research, and practice associated with child abuse and neglect fatalities. To date, the Commission has hosted public meetings in San Antonio, TX; Tampa, FL; Detroit, MI; Denver, CO, and Burlington, VT.

The commission is charged with the study of:

- The use and effectiveness of federally funded child protective and child welfare services
- Best practices for and barriers to preventing child abuse and neglect fatalities
- The effectiveness of federal, state, and local data collection systems, and how to improve them
- Risk factors for child maltreatment
- How to prioritize prevention services for families with the greatest needs

The legislation mandates that the commission submit a report to the president and Congress on these issues within two years (with the potential to extend the deadline by an additional year). The report will detail specific recommendations for strategies to better track and eliminate child abuse and neglect fatalities.

About The Commission

The Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities is a federal agency established by legislation to study and make recommendations on eliminating child abuse and neglect fatalities. The Commission was formed as a result of the “Protect Our Kids Act” and is made up of six Presidential appointees and six Congressional appointees. For more information, please go to <http://eliminatechildabusefatalities.sites.usa.gov>.

Media Notes: To request an interview with a member of the Commission or request more information about the Commission, please contact Jennifer Devlin at 703-876-1714 or Jennifer.devlin@CECANF.usa.gov.