

Questions for the Record from Senator Charles E. Grassley

Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Protecting Our Children – The Importance of Training Child Protection Professionals

May 23, 2012

For Chris Newlin:

1. I'm interested in your thoughts about teacher reporting laws. In your opinion, how effective are teacher reporting laws? What additional training may be necessary to provide to teachers to ensure that they report suspected child abuse to the proper authorities?

Response: All teachers are mandated reporters as part of the larger Mandated Reporting laws implemented in all fifty states. This could be enhanced by a federal law also requiring teachers to report suspected child abuse and neglect because we know from the research that teachers/school personnel, almost more than any other group, are made aware of abuse concerns/allegations through their significant contact with children. The research has further shown that teachers, along with pediatricians and many other subgroups, do not always report suspected child abuse, thus leaving children potentially vulnerable to further abuse and without any support for the abuse they may have experienced. I find this personally troubling, and we have seen cases in our community where school personnel have endangered the well-being of children by not reporting suspected (even virtually known) child abuse. Teachers, and honestly all professionals working with children, should be required to receive training during college about child abuse and mandated reporting statutes. Further, this should be part of the continuing education school personnel receive each and every year. If we don't keep this issue front and center, it will recede into the darkness as it has for many years. The U.S. Department of Education could require states to implement this type of training in all school districts. Let me say, there are thousands of school personnel who take seriously the Mandated Reporting Laws and personal ethical stance to report suspected child abuse, and I applaud their efforts.

There are more than 850 Children's Advocacy Centers throughout the United States which served more than 270,000 children in 2011 alone. These programs have trained staff, working in collaboration with law enforcement, prosecutors, child protection services, victim advocates, medical experts, and mental health experts, who would be ideally suited to assist with this training. We have done this in our community for many years, and yet, we still have isolated incidents where school personnel do not attempt to intervene on behalf of our children. This must be improved, and I greatly appreciate your attention toward this serious issue.

2. It appears that there's a great deal of cooperation at the local level, including multi-disciplinary teams and Child Advocacy Centers. At the federal level, both the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Services are vital to helping train professionals in the field. Is there anything done at the federal level that impedes cooperation at the local level? Do you have suggestions on what the federal government can do better to encourage more state and local cooperation?

Response: You are correct that the last 27 years have seen an incredible grassroots movement to facilitate the multidisciplinary response to child abuse, and these efforts are demonstrated to consistently provide better outcomes for the children involved, the investigations and prosecutions of criminal acts, all while also saving approximately \$1,000 per case because of the elimination of duplicative services/activities. While these are very positive advances, we have not seen the same level of collaboration at the federal level. While there are many dedicated federal employees who oversee these efforts within their Departments, they are not always empowered to reach across to other Departments to coordinate funding and intervention efforts. What we lack is a clear National Strategy to Protect Our Children. The federal government should seek to unite the Department of Justice, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Education to develop a collaborative strategy for improving the protection of our children while also coordinating their various funding of initiatives focused on the protection of children. By modeling this collaboration at the federal level, we would see even greater implementation at the state and local levels on behalf of our children. Each of these Departments is investing some resources to this issue. Coordinating these efforts with broader goals and metrics would help ensure that we continue to make progress in the fight against child abuse. It is truly an issue that is affecting our nation's health and economic productivity, and our nation/citizens will dramatically benefit from this dedicated effort.