

Congressional Testimony
Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts
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I am a recently retired child abuse detective who has, over the course of a 28-year career, trained thousands of law enforcement officers and other multidisciplinary team members (i.e., prosecutors, CPS workers, advocates, and therapists) across the United States. Over the past 25 years, I have served on the board of directors for numerous child abuse organizations and currently serve on the boards of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) and the Native American Children's Alliance (NACA), as well as several coalitions, task forces, and committees. I am one of the founders of my local Children's Advocacy Center, where I helped to create and serve on its multidisciplinary team, task force, board of directors, and advisory board. Two years ago I left police work to accept the newly-created position of Director of Youth Protection for the Boy Scouts of America.

When I began investigating child abuse, little to no formal training was available, and certainly an investigation-specific national organization I could call for assistance did not exist. Over the course of my career, I came to realize that a child abuse investigator needs training in numerous areas prior to ever being assigned a case, i.e., physical abuse recognition; symptomology of the different types of abuse; evidence and evidence collection; the forensic interview of a child and adolescent victims; youth and adult witnesses; non-offending caregivers and the dynamics involved therein; neglect; sexual abuse; perpetrator dynamics, behaviors, and typologies; deception detection; and interrogation. From bucket handle fractures to parentification to victim compliancy; interconnection of domestic violence to abuse; abusive head trauma; multi-victim sexual exploitation and, in recent years, Internet-facilitated crimes and the exploitation of children and youth. A lone child abuse investigator or CPS worker may be assigned cases dealing with each of these issues on any given day.

Thus, when I first became a child abuse detective I, quite frankly, had no idea what I was doing. In those days you interviewed victims and parents, interrogated perpetrators, and conducted your own investigations. This was in the years prior to CACs and MDTs, when joint investigations were recommended, but not required. I graduated from a criminal justice-focused university with a BSCJ; but if my professors had a law enforcement or related background, they had not specialized in child abuse. Nor was it covered in any aspect of my coursework, aside from perpetrator behavior being briefly mentioned in Deviant Psychology.

Because I worked for a police department located near Dallas, Texas, I was aware of the Dallas Child Sexual Exploitation unit. I called and asked to observe their perpetrator interrogations, crime scene evaluations, and evidence collection techniques. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this practical, real-life experience with senior level investigators and real cases of abuse would

form the core of my investigative knowledge. It is precisely these same hands-on, practical, scenario-based, close-to-real-life experiences that the National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC) provides through their lectures, mock crime scenes, courtrooms, and case review training.

Today, child protection professionals attend numerous national and international conferences bringing together a myriad of child maltreatment presenters covering an array of topics. There are multi-state and regional level conferences that do the same. These conferences serve specific niche areas and introduce professionals to new research, academic debates in the field and medical, therapeutic, and advocacy practices. However, these conferences often do not address the needs of new child protection professionals for the basic-to-advanced skills training necessary to intervene and investigate numerous child maltreatment areas. This is because it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide intensive, hands-on training at a large conference.

Over the course of my career, I have conducted hundreds of trainings in nearly every state in the United States and I continue to speak at major conferences. The majority of my trainings have been held with Children's Advocacy Centers and the MDTs based in their service communities, primarily covering skills-based topics of child abuse investigation relevant to them. I have spent a great deal of time at after-event sessions conversing with local professionals and experts alike on "solving the world's problems" as they relate to child abuse. I consider many of our nation's foremost experts my personal mentors, friends, and colleagues.

I followed three basic principles during my training career:

- Protect one child at a time;
- Provide intervening child protection professionals the relevant information I wish someone had taught me when I began my investigative career, in a form and format conducive to real learning and practical application in the field; and
- Make a difference for these professionals as they go to work the next day.

I have included with my testimony an article written by Robert Giles, in which he makes a compelling argument for the importance of MDT investigations. Unfortunately, it is not enough to form an MDT; the team members must receive intensive, practical training. Today, if you polled one hundred law enforcement professionals assigned to investigate all forms of child abuse that may come to their attention and asked them the simple question, "Does your agency, your local CAC/MDT, or a local college or university properly prepare and train you in the BASIC skills needed to respond, investigate, and create a criminally-prosecutable child abuse case prior to being assigned to investigate these cases?," nearly every response would be a resounding "NO." If you were to then follow up with these same professionals in three years, the answer to this question would remain virtually unchanged.

There are three reasons for this. First, undergraduate and graduate programs do not provide this education. Second, large or regional conferences are poorly equipped to provide this training. Third, intensive, hands-on training is not yet widely available at a regional, much less state level. To address this, I believe the following steps should be taken.

First, the training of MDTs must begin at the undergraduate and graduate level, including community colleges and police academies. I continue to see well-meaning, experienced child protection professionals who either lack formal training or, even worse, are poorly trained in the most basic aspects of child abuse investigation. We can continue to pour vast amounts of time and resources into reaching (and retraining) as many of these professionals as possible, or we can address this problem more efficiently at its source, by dramatically improving undergraduate and graduate training of child abuse professionals. I am very familiar with the Child Advocacy Studies curriculum that began at Winona State University and is now spreading across the country. This is greatly needed, long-overdue reform that must be sustained.

Second, federal training funds should be focused on helping states develop the infrastructure necessary to provide intensive training with small class sizes. The work of the National District Attorneys Association, National Child Protection Training Center, and CornerHouse in helping states establish five-day forensic interview training programs that meet national standards is the sort of program Congress should be funding. Instead of offering these programs at a national level, and reaching only hundreds of professionals, we can provide them at the state level and reach thousands.

Third, there should be more emphasis on state and local training than on national training. In an effort to reach those communities most in need of training, I worked with NCPTC to establish their Speaker's Bureau. For the price of sending three or four professionals to a national conference, many communities have found they could work with NCPTC in developing a local training tailored to their unique needs that could reach hundreds. Addressing child abuse in a rural community lacking resources will be very different from addressing maltreatment in an urban setting. As a board member for the Native American Children's Alliance, I can assure you that community-based training in which the leaders of a particular Tribe have significant developmental involvement is the only type of training that will work in these communities.

Fourth, there must be an emphasis on practical publications that help MDTs with the nuts and bolts of responding to an allegation of child abuse. I've attached to my written testimony an article from OJJDP summarizing their portable field guides, as well as an article published by NCPTC on the collection of corroborating evidence. Publications such as these are sorely needed and warmly received by MDTs throughout the country. See my attached "Intervention Window of Opportunity" article as an example.

Fifth, in funding research, Congress should focus on researchers with a deep appreciation for the importance of working with front line professionals. There is a growing awareness that the best researchers, those whose work actually impacts and improves the lives of children

and is applicable to first responders and interventionists, are those who regularly share a cup of coffee with law enforcement officers and prosecutors. Simply stated, many researchers have come to value the practical experience of front line professionals who, in the course of their careers, interact with thousands of child abuse victims, extended family members, and survivors. To the extent this wealth of experience contributes to or drives the research, the research will also drive the work of front line criminal justice professionals. In other words, researchers realize more than ever that the only research impacting the field of child protection is research relevant to the work of front line professionals. The critical importance of working with front line professionals in conducting research is more fully discussed in an article I recently co-authored for the *APSAC Advisor* and is also attached to my written testimony.

Sixth, there must be one or more national organizations available to help frontline professionals on individual cases. No matter how effective training is, or how comprehensive a publication may be, real life cases of child abuse often have myriad nuances that no one has seen before. Accordingly, it is critical for these professionals to have organizations such as the National Child Protection Training Center and the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse to help guide them through difficult cases.

Seventh, there is a need to train MDTs to take a more active role in prevention initiatives. Law enforcement officers, social workers, and medical professionals often work with families in need and are in the best position to identify what, if any, prevention programs may work in their community. Accordingly, it is critical to train these professionals at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as once they are in the field, to take a leadership role in the prevention of abuse.

Finally, training dollars should be directed to a larger purpose than simply training. When Victor Vieth published *Unto the Third Generation*, and argued that not only could our country end child abuse but proposed a concrete plan to achieve the goal, frontline professionals responded with their hearts and with actions. I have seen communities, states, and regions mobilize and implement not just one, but a series of reforms based on that paper. These reforms include CAST, ChildFirst, and community-based prevention initiatives. If child abuse is to end, it will be accomplished by front line professionals working with the children and families in their communities. Simply stated, the solution must be driven from the bottom up.

Attachments to the testimony of Michael V. Johnson:

1. Robert H. Giles, *Difficult Economic Times Prove Value of Multidisciplinary Approaches to Resolve Child Abuse*, 22(1) UPDATE (2009)
2. Michael Johnson and Victor Vieth, *When the Call Comes: APSAC's Historic Recognition of Law Enforcement Officers and Prosecutors as Professionals*, 24 APSAC ADVISOR 25(WINTER/SPRING 2012)
3. Janet McNaughton, *Overview of the Portable Guides to Investigating Child Abuse: Update 2000*, JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN (FEBRUARY 2000)
4. Victor I. Vieth, *When the Child Has Spoken: Corroborating the Forensic Interview*, 2(5) CENTERPIECE (2010)
5. Detective Mike Johnson, *The Investigative Window of Opportunity: The Vital Link to Corroboration in Child Sex Abuse Cases*, 1(9) CENTERPIECE (2009)