

**Congressional Testimony**  
**Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts**  
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In 1998, I finished law school and left a lucrative career to work in a prosecutor's office for ¼ of the annual salary I received in my previous job. I have no clear explanation for this decision except that I wanted to work for just and fair treatment of children and somehow this job was going to lead me to that place. Two years ago, my last week on the job as a deputy prosecutor was spent trying a case of child sexual abuse. At the conclusion, the victim said, "Thank you. You are the only person who has ever fought for me." It was the perfect way to leave my front line career as I moved into training others on what I had learned from my experiences.

I would like to take the credit for that "Thank you" but I can't because I am no one special. In the world of child protection professionals, I am one more person who wants just and fair treatment of children; who wants a better life and the opportunity to achieve their potential for all of our children. What made me different from the previous prosecutors who had ignored that victim's cry for help was that I had been given the tools I needed to fight. When I was put in the position of handling child abuse cases, my boss knew I didn't have the necessary background. She knew that law school had not prepared me to present the testimony of a child witness in court or how to protect that child from aggressive defense attorneys. She knew that neither law school nor my previous case load had equipped me to help investigators understand how important corroboration of even minute details would be in child victim cases. She knew that no one had ever helped me understand the dynamics of a family in crisis or a community that would support a child abuser over the abused child.

So she mentored me. She did everything she could to find training opportunities and the funds to send me to take advantage of those trainings. And she often covered my cases herself so that I could leave the office to fly 1,000 miles, sometimes more, to get that training. So while I am no one special, my circumstances were very special. It is unfortunately all too common that many of those who supervise child protection professionals either don't understand the importance of the specialized training necessary or lack the funds to pay the associated costs. There are thousands of prosecutors, detectives, social workers, forensic interviewers, victim advocates and even judicial officers who work each day with one hand tied behind their backs for lack of knowledge or for lack of a place to go for information. These professionals need to be encouraged in several ways.

**First, they must know that they are not alone.** Providing ongoing, easily accessible and affordable training will increase the skills of these professionals. They must have opportunities to work and train with others to expand and improve their skills and to share experiences and techniques. So often being able to network with other professionals can assist in providing ideas

for better corroboration of current or future cases. Sharing the experiences of others who have “been where” you’ve been may be the difference between burning out or being renewed and reenergized.

**Second, they must know that their efforts will extend beyond their working life.** Anyone who has worked in a child protection role, has seen innumerable colleagues come and go. Some of these people left because they lacked the necessary training coming into the job and weren’t able to access what they needed to become proficient. Some of these people over time had become extremely good at their jobs but simply wore out, becoming discouraged by the seemingly never-ending stream of victims. Both of these categories of individuals will benefit from the expansion of the Child Advocacy Studies Curriculum (CAST). Prospective child protection professionals attending schools with CAST courses will be given the tools they need to become proficient very early in their careers. Those currently in the field will have the opportunity to utilize some of these courses themselves. More importantly, those currently in the field will recognize the commitment of the institutions to improving training and education for the future front-line. They will be encouraged by the young people taking these courses with an eye toward following the current front liners in the fight to end child abuse. Many of these men and women will “retire” and reenter the work force as adjunct faculty at a CAST college or university. In this way, the future front line learns directly from those who’ve already been in the trenches. **Third, they must have the opportunity to access training closer to home including more intensive and frequent opportunities for those with already have heavy case loads.** The currently existing national conferences provide excellent opportunities for training on a wide array of relevant topics. The downside is that these conferences are limited to a one time per year presentation and can be expensive for medium to small jurisdictions. These trainings require the majority of attendees to travel long distances, stay several nights in hotels and pay a conference fee of several hundred dollars or more. Small jurisdictions are stretched not only financially but many simply lack the manpower to adequately cover their daily workload if officers/investigators/social workers are gone for a week. Regionally based trainings can be smaller in scope and held several times per year with lesser travel costs.

Another advantage of smaller, regional trainings is the greater frequency for fewer attendees at a time. It is difficult for the front line folks to access these national trainers at conferences with hundreds or thousands of attendees beyond what they are able to glean within the ninety-minute presentation itself. Smaller regional trainings allow for smaller attendees per training. Trainers can be available to answer questions or review specific problems of virtually all those attending the training.

**Fourth, front line professionals must have a resource for staying abreast of current issues.** There are some jurisdictions who may not be able to attend any trainings for financial or manpower reasons. Even those who are able to access regional trainings won’t attend every course offered or may have to deal with an issue not covered in a recently attended course. The ability to access information via webinars or publications can greatly enhance the knowledge and

confidence level of front line workers. Newsletters from the National District Attorney's Association, the National Child Protection Training Center and its prevention program, the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center are excellent sources of ideas and suggestions encompassing all areas of importance for all front line professionals. Continuation and expansion of these types of resources, along with technical assistance by phone or email, place help within the reach of all regardless of jurisdiction size, manpower concerns or financial constraints.

**Fifth, research is needed in critical areas, particularly as it relates to the most current issues and trends in the investigation, litigation and prosecution of cases of child maltreatment; prevention efforts which encompass the use of new technology may also be enhanced by research.** Future research efforts should include front line child protection professionals in determining the direction of studies to include how our children and those who prey on them are utilizing the ever changing and ever broadening technology landscape. Discourse between scientists and those on the front line will encourage greater applicability of research studies by those in the field, in the courtroom and by those individuals fashioning prevention programs for their communities.

**Sixth, let's engage our communities as a whole in the protection of children.** Understanding of child maltreatment, its causes and its costs, must be spread throughout all realms of society. Training for mandated reporters must be extended beyond a class period or a few hours for undergraduates studying in a mandated reporter major or minor. Graduate schools should include such training for future doctors, physician assistants, dentists, dental hygienists, seminarians and lawyers. School districts should mandate several hours at the start of each school year for all teachers and administration to receive training and updates. Churches, youth groups, community sports programs and facilities which care for children after school should be involved in annual training. Government alone, no matter how intensive its efforts, will not single-handedly be able to end child abuse. Prevention from the local community up will yield far greater successes if the infrastructure is in place to encourage these local efforts.

**Seventh, those committed to ending child abuse must set a cohesive plan for the present and the future.** To assure our communities, our front line workers, our future professionals and our children that we are serious about coming together to end child abuse, we must plan, fund and implement a cohesive program to achieve that goal. Universities and colleges teaching practical, real life scenarios, in laboratory settings whenever possible, is the best way to have the future professional ready to hit the ground running. Smaller, more frequent regionally based trainings allow the trainers to interact more closely with the front line and assess directly what their needs of the front line are at a given point in time. This more "hands on" approach allows trainers to identify strengths and weaknesses to be addressed through future training or, in more urgent situations, through publication of an article or webinar directed toward an area of concern. The coordination of these regional centers in reviewing their own programs and discussing the CAST curricula with colleges and universities in their regions will build a "national team" that thinks globally but acts locally. Such a unified approach ensures that we are equipped to fight

for every child every day. Those who work so tirelessly for children should often hear the words “Thank you for fighting for me.” Until the day that we need fight no more.