



TO: Presidential Campaigns  
FROM: Safe, Healthy, and Ready to Learn Coalition  
DATE: February 2, 2016  
RE: Recommendations to reduce childhood exposure to violence and effectively respond to the effects of trauma

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Every year, 46 million children in the United States are exposed to violence, crime, abuse, or psychological trauma.<sup>1</sup> This is **two** out of every **three** children in the United States. For children exposed to multiple types of violence and suffering, this adversity can actually change their brain chemistry, often with severe consequences for their health, educational attainment, and economic success. The effects are especially harmful on the nearly one-quarter of children living in poverty. Children of color experience the highest rates of poverty—32 percent of Hispanic, 36 percent of Native American, and 39 percent of African American children live in poverty.<sup>2</sup>

The sad reality is that too many of our children are not safe, healthy, or thriving.

The undersigned organizations represent a diverse spectrum of national, state, and local groups that work in areas including education, health, juvenile justice, and child development. Collectively, we represent millions of parents, children, health care professionals,

community-based advocates, and educators. We call on each of the candidates for the office of President of the United States to acknowledge the grave social, emotional, and economic consequences to continued inattention to this national challenge and to lay out a vision of a society where all children are safe, healthy, and ready to learn. In support of that goal, we propose an action plan that is laid out more fully in this memorandum and involves three major strategies:

In particular, I would like to call attention to those family members who are the most vulnerable, the young. For many of them, a future filled with countless possibilities beckons, yet so many others seem disoriented and aimless, trapped in a hopeless maze of violence, abuse, and despair. Their problems are our problems. We cannot avoid them. We need to face them together, to talk about them, and to seek effective solutions rather than getting bogged down in discussions.

– Address of Pope Francis to a Joint Session of Congress, September 24, 2015

1. Educate the public about the existence and serious nature of children being exposed to violence and the effects of trauma;
2. Promote multi-generational and preventive approaches that break the cycle of violence; and,
3. Support training that helps all child-serving professionals recognize, prevent, and effectively respond to childhood exposure to violence and the effects of trauma.

The Appendix to this memorandum contains recommendations for action by the White House and Congress, accompanied by detailed suggestions for the Department of Education, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

### **We Must Move Beyond Platitudes To Address Formidable Challenges**

It is time to move beyond the easily delivered sentiments regarding children being our future and to instead take action to create the conditions in which children can thrive. There are many challenges. Too many children face chronic risk factors that make it more likely that they will experience the effects of trauma, including greater exposure to risks such as unsafe neighborhoods, living in homes where physical or emotional abuse occurs, and lack of access to critical resources. Although these conditions do not absolve schools from their responsibility to provide educational excellence, they underscore the formidable challenges to school success for millions of students.

There is a direct correlation between childhood exposure to violence and poor health, education, social, and economic outcomes for far too many children in this country – rich or poor, black, white, or brown.

To take just a few examples:

- Students traumatized by exposure to violence have lower grade-point averages, more negative remarks in their cumulative records, and more reported absences from school than other students.
- Chronic stress can have a permanent negative effect on the chemical and physical structures of a child's brain, causing trouble with attention, concentration, memory, and creativity.
- Seventy-three to 95 percent of children in the juvenile justice system are estimated to evidence trauma symptoms due to violence exposure.<sup>3</sup>
- Individuals who have experienced six or more adverse childhood experiences die 20 years earlier on average than those who have experienced none.

The harms from childhood exposure to violence and the effects of trauma are further detailed in a 2015 report we released, [“Safe, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: Policy Recommendations to Ensure Children Thrive in Supportive Communities Free From Trauma and Violence.”](#)

### **There Are Significant Economic Consequences To Inaction**

There is a collective moral responsibility to ensure that all children have a safe and healthy start in life that opens them up to limitless possibilities. In addition to the moral responsibility, there is a stark economic imperative to addressing the effects of childhood violence and trauma:

<b>Area</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Annual Cost</b>
<b>Health</b>	Youth Violence	\$333—\$750 Billion <sup>4</sup>
	Rape, Assault, and Stalking	\$8.3 Billion cost due to violence against women <sup>5</sup>
	Child Maltreatment	Over \$80 Billion <sup>6</sup>
<b>Juvenile Justice</b>	Lost Income from Youth Incarceration	\$4—\$8 Billion <sup>7</sup>
<b>Education</b>	School Discipline	\$41 million for retained students and \$711 million in economic impact just in Texas <sup>8</sup>

### **There Are Solutions That Work**

These costs are staggering, but the good news is that the effects of trauma on children are reversible - and there are programs out there that work. For instance, we have seen schools across the country make dramatic gains in positive school climates and academic achievement once they adopted trauma-informed practices:

- At El Dorado Elementary School in San Francisco, [office referrals dropped by 74 percent and suspensions dropped by 89 percent.](#)<sup>9</sup>
- At the Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven, CT, [the number of suspensions dropped by two-thirds and college enrollment increased from 48 percent to 70 percent in just two years.](#)<sup>10</sup>

- The non-profit organization Partnership for Children in New York City, which provides social workers for schools, reports that its schools have [seen improvements in safety and attendance, as well as significant increases in reading and math scores.](#)<sup>11</sup>

States are also starting to make sustained efforts. For example, Tennessee, where adverse childhood experiences is estimated to cost communities more than \$200,000 per child, is embarking on a three-year initiative to take a comprehensive public policy approach to help communities across the state develop and implement prevention and intervention strategies.

These results are not just due to the hard work of dedicated teachers, administrators, support staff, and communities. They are also due to adults recognizing the needs of children and addressing those needs head on. We can set ourselves on a path to get similar results nationwide, if we collectively have the will to make the necessary changes to our communities and schools.

Given the costs associated with doing nothing, and the benefits that can accrue by addressing childhood exposure to violence and the effects of trauma, we urge you to support and endorse the following three recommendations. These recommendations are designed to change practice, as well as service delivery systems, so that children thrive and the next generation is equipped for success. **This is a nonpartisan issue that affects tens of millions children in the United States. We encourage you to support these efforts and incorporate these proposals into your policy platform.**

#### **I. EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT CHILDHOOD EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE, THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA, AND HOW TO RESPOND EFFECTIVELY**

Although the research is clear and compelling on the effects of exposure to violence and the effects of trauma on children, far too few professionals, parents, and policymakers know about this link. Establishing this base of knowledge is a critical component of creating systems change.

The next Administration has a unique opportunity to ensure that all child-serving professionals and policymakers have this base of knowledge and set goals for violence reduction and the impact of trauma. Specifically, the next Administration should:

- Initiate a public awareness campaign that focuses on the effects that exposure to violence and trauma have on children, as well as identify available resources. The campaign should be customized to state, local, and tribal needs and be culturally relevant.

- Create a White House-level task force that will identify an overarching strategy for reducing childhood violence, appropriately treating the effects of trauma, and set goals for violence and trauma reduction.
- Permit public education and community outreach efforts to be an allowable use of funds under relevant federal grants.

## **II. PROMOTE MULTI-GENERATION SOLUTIONS AND PREVENTIVE APPROACHES TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE**

The unfortunate reality is that children who witness or experience physical or sexual violence are at much greater risk for future victimization and perpetration, as well as delinquency, school failure, substance abuse, illness, and early mortality.<sup>12</sup> The earlier we invest in preventive measures to break this cycle, the more likely our nation can avoid these societal costs. Specifically, the next Administration should:

- Support the expansion of the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV), which is set to expire in September 2017. Home visiting programs like those funded by MIECHV offer a variety of voluntary parenting supports and family-focused services to expectant parents and families with young children. They address issues such as maternal and child health, positive parenting practices, safe home environments, and access to services. Research shows that home visiting is one of the most effective, cost-saving ways to address issues new parents face and help them access the supports and services they need.
- Modify Medicaid and child welfare financing formulas to extend services to parents to address their own experience of violence and trauma. Medicaid should also be modified to provide an optional benefit for home visiting services.
- Support the integration of trauma-related education on healthy relationships and parenting into diversion and reentry programs to help children leaving the juvenile justice system form and maintain healthy relationships, thereby reducing recidivism.
- Expand funding for programs to prevent dating violence and domestic violence by supporting initiatives through the Centers for Disease Control, Department of Education, and the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Office on Violence Against Women to promote healthy relationships among children and to engage men and boys in prevention.
- Increase funding for DOJ's Defending Childhood Initiative so that DOJ can provide seed funds for localities to create trauma-informed communities in coordination with their schools.

### **III. SUPPORT THE TRAINING OF ALL CHILD-SERVING PROFESSIONALS ON PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO CHILDHOOD EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA**

The success of policy solutions for reducing exposure to violence and its traumatic effects on children depends heavily on the ability of those on the ground to effectively deliver needed services. This is a shared responsibility that covers all child-serving professionals. While most of this training should occur at the state and local level, it is incumbent on the federal government to support these efforts, both financially and through the dissemination of best practices. Specifically, the next Administration should:

- Invest resources so that all child-serving professionals can receive pre-service training, as well as in-service and/or continuing education and support related to the effects of violence and trauma on children's development, and actions that these professionals can take to improve outcomes for children.
- Provide training and technical assistance, including a best practices guide, to school districts on the intersections among childhood trauma, race/gender equity, social and emotional learning, and excessive school discipline, as well as strategies and practices that have proven to work, so schools can improve student achievement, increase graduation rates, and reduce violence.
- Provide financial support to professional associations to develop and disseminate standards for providing comprehensive specialized supports for children exposed to violence.

We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations. We know that implementation will not be easy, but that should not deter us from collectively taking the steps necessary to ensure that all children are safe, healthy, and ready to learn. Please contact Kiersten Stewart, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at Futures Without Violence, at [kstewart@futureswithoutviolence.org](mailto:kstewart@futureswithoutviolence.org), if you have any questions or need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education  
American Counseling Association  
American Federation of School Administrators  
American School Counselor Association  
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)  
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence  
Center for Health and Health Care in Schools, The George Washington University  
Child Care Aware of America

Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries  
Council for Exceptional Children  
First Focus  
Futures Without Violence  
FORGE, Inc.  
Girls Inc.  
HiTOPS  
Milwaukee Center for Children and Youth, Inc.  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Education Association  
National PTA  
National Superintendents Roundtable  
Parents as Teachers  
Peace Over Violence  
Prevent Child Abuse America  
Prevention Institute  
Safe Alliance  
School Social Work Association of America  
The School Superintendents Association (AASA)  
Turnaround for Children  
Up2Us Now Child Abuse Prevention Coalition  
Wica Agli  
YWCA USA

## APPENDIX

### PROGRAMMATIC AND POLICY INITIATIVES TO ENSURE ALL CHILDREN ARE SAFE, HEALTHY, AND READY TO LEARN

#### I. Executive Branch Actions

##### A. Cross-Cutting

1. Create a White House-level task force that will identify an overarching strategy for reducing childhood exposure to violence and appropriately treating the effects of trauma.
2. Require federal agencies doing this work (e.g., Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Justice) to coordinate their grant-making, research, and programmatic work related to childhood trauma and to promote two-generation solutions.
3. Initiate a public awareness campaign that focuses on the effect of trauma on children and available resources.
4. Provide resources and training so that all child-serving professionals can receive pre-service training, as well as in-service and/or continuing education and support related to childhood exposure to violence and trauma.
5. Convene a White House summit on childhood trauma and violence.

##### B. Department of Education

1. Provide, as appropriate, regulatory and non-regulatory guidance, as well as technical assistance, for school districts on how to effectively implement the provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that address exposure to violence and trauma, school climate, mental health services, and related issues in school accountability and improvement efforts, state, district, and school reporting, professional development opportunities, and programmatic activities.
2. Provide technical assistance, including a best practices guide, to school districts on the intersections among childhood trauma, race/gender equity, social and emotional learning, and excessive school discipline, as well as solutions that have proven to work.
3. Create and fund a technical assistance center dedicated to assisting states and school districts in creating and supporting trauma sensitive schools.

##### C. Department of Health and Human Services

1. Provide detailed guidance on how physicians and social service professionals can receive information from, and better coordinate with, schools and community-based health centers about children's mental health needs while remaining in compliance with federal privacy laws.



2. Provide technical assistance to health care providers so they can effectively deliver universal education to parents and caregivers about the impact of exposure to violence on children and deliver more integrated care to children who may already be exposed to violence.
3. Expand targeted prevention programs focused on healthy relationships among children.

#### **D. Department of Justice**

1. Ensure the Community Oriented Policing Services hiring program grants directed to school resource officer positions require cross-training of school resource officers, educators, and other school-based personnel on social and emotional learning, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and other evidence-based school climate programs.
2. Support the integration of trauma-related education on healthy relationships and parenting into diversion and reentry programs to help children leaving the juvenile justice system form and maintain healthy relationships, thereby reducing recidivism.
3. Increase and/or repurpose funding within DOJ's Office of Justice Programs to provide greater support for community and state-based juvenile justice delinquency prevention programs and to incentivize states to invest in improved educational offerings and related supports for children in correctional settings.

## **II. Legislative Branch Actions**

### **A. Education**

1. Provide funding at the authorized levels in ESSA for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants program so that states and school districts have sufficient federal funds to support the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students.
2. Provide sufficient funding so that schools can hire specialized instructional support personnel, including school social workers, school counselors, and other highly-qualified staff members, with the credentialing and experience recommended by nationally recognized professional organizations.
3. Provide funding at the authorized levels for the Community Support for School Success program in ESSA that is funded through Title IV National Activities to incentivize the creation and maintenance of full-service community schools that are trauma-sensitive.

### **B. Health**

1. Reauthorize and expand the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program.

2. Modify Medicaid and child welfare financing formulas to extend services to parents to address their own experience of trauma.
3. Expand funding for domestic violence prevention and response services within the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.
4. Incorporate appropriate policies concerning trauma-informed care and services in the Head Start reauthorization.
5. Ensure that any new mental health legislation contains appropriate provisions on trauma informed care and services for children.
6. Increase funding for prevention programs in the Violence Against Women Act, including prevention programs targeting men and boys.

**C. Juvenile Justice**

1. Reauthorize the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and ensure the new Act includes an explicit focus on training all personnel in the juvenile justice system on the effects of trauma on children's behavior, and providing community-based resources to support these children.
2. Give states incentives to prohibit the detention of children for status offenses and to promote community-based, school-based, and family-focused interventions for children who commit status offenses and who are at high risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system.
3. Provide grants to divert children from detention and incarceration and into home- or community-based care settings whenever appropriate, which are less expensive and more effective for meeting children's needs than juvenile justice facilities.
4. Expand funding for DOJ's Defending Childhood Initiative.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all statistics in this document are taken from Futures Without Violence, et al., “*Safe, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: Policy Recommendations to Ensure Children Thrive in Supportive Communities Free From Trauma and Violence.*” May 2015. Web: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/fwvcorp/wp-content/uploads/20160125133319/Safe-Healthy-Ready-to-Learn\\_1.2016.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/fwvcorp/wp-content/uploads/20160125133319/Safe-Healthy-Ready-to-Learn_1.2016.pdf). This document uses the word “child” or “children” to refer to people under the age of 18.

<sup>2</sup> Yang, J., et al., “*Basic Facts About Low-Income Children.*” National Center for Children in Poverty. January 2015. pp. 4. Web: [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text\\_1100.pdf](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1100.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Kilpatrick, D.G., et al., “*Violence and Risk of PTSD, Major Depression, Substance Abuse/Dependence and Comorbidity: Results from the National Survey of Adolescents.*” Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology. Volume 71, Issue 4. 2003. pp. 692-700. Web: <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/ccp/71/4/692/>; Cauffman, E., et al., “*Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Among Female Juvenile Offenders.*” Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Volume 37, Issue 7. 1998. pp. 1209-16. Web: [http://www.jaacap.com/article/S0890-8567\(09\)66633-8/abstract?cc=y](http://www.jaacap.com/article/S0890-8567(09)66633-8/abstract?cc=y); Abram, K. M., “*Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Trauma in Youth in Juvenile Detention.*” Archives of General Psychiatry. Volume 61, Issue 4. 2004. pp. 403-10. Web: <http://archpsyc.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=481985>

<sup>4</sup> The predicted incremental cost of childhood violence and abuse on the healthcare system alone ranges from \$333 billion to \$750 billion annually, or up to 37½ cents of every dollar spent on health care. Listenbee, R., et al., “*Report of Attorney General’s National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence.*” U.S. Department of Justice. Dec. 2012. pp. 28. Web: <http://www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/cev-rpt-full.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> In the United States in 1995, the cost of intimate partner rape, physical assault and stalking totaled \$5.8 billion each year for direct medical and mental health care services and lost productivity from paid work and household chores. When updated to 2003 dollars, the cost is more than \$8.3 billion. Max, W., et al., “*The Economic Toll of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States.*” Violence and Victims. Volume, 19, Issue 3. 2004. pp. 259. Web: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15631280>

<sup>6</sup> Gelles, R., & Perlman, S., “*Estimated Annual Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect.*” Prevent Child Abuse America. (2012). Web: [http://www.preventchildabuse.org/images/research/pcaa\\_cost\\_report\\_2012\\_gelles\\_perlman.pdf](http://www.preventchildabuse.org/images/research/pcaa_cost_report_2012_gelles_perlman.pdf). The total lifetime estimated financial costs associated with just one year of confirmed cases of child maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and neglect) is approximately \$124 billion. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “*Child Abuse and Neglect Cost the United States \$124 billion.*” Feb. 1, 2012. Web: [http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2012/p0201\\_child\\_abuse.html](http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2012/p0201_child_abuse.html)

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<sup>7</sup> Petteruti, A., et al., “*Sticker Shock: Calculating the Full Price Tag for Youth Incarceration.*” Justice Policy Institute. Dec. 2014. pp. 31. Web.

[http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/sticker\\_shock\\_final\\_v2.pdf](http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/sticker_shock_final_v2.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Students who are not in class are typically not learning. In a longitudinal study conducted in Texas, 15 percent of the student sample was suspended from school in a given year. Students of color and those with special educational designations received a disproportionate number of suspensions – results consistent with national trends. The study’s results indicated that school discipline was connected with approximately 4,700 grade retentions per year in Texas and a 29 percent increase in the dropout rate. Each additional year of education for retained students costs Texas \$41 million and dropouts have an economic impact of \$711 million for the state. Marchbanks III, M., et al., “*The Economic Effects of Exclusionary Discipline on Grade Retention and High School Dropout.*” April 2013. Web:

<http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/state-reports/the-economic-effects-of-exclusionary-discipline-on-grade-retention-and-high-school-dropout>

<sup>9</sup> Ellen, J., “*San Francisco’s El Dorado Elementary Uses Trauma-Informed & Restorative Practices; Suspensions Drop 89%.*” ACES Too High News. January 28, 2014. Web:

<http://acestoohigh.com/2014/01/28/hearts-el-dorado-elementary/>

<sup>10</sup> Kolodner, M., “*A Radical Approach to Discipline That Starts With Listening to Students.*” The Hechinger Report. April 2015. Web: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/zero-tolerance-fails-schools-teaching-students-cope-trauma/>

<sup>11</sup> Kolodner, M., “*At a School in Brooklyn’s Poorest Neighborhood, Literacy is up and Disciplinary Problems are Down.*” The Hechinger Report. November 2015. Web:

<http://hechingerreport.org/at-a-school-in-brooklyns-poorest-neighborhood-literacy-is-up-and-disciplinary-problems-are-down/>

<sup>12</sup> Family Violence Prevention Fund, “*An Agenda for Action to End Violence Against Women and Children: Recommendations for a New Administration.*” Available at:

[http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/PublicPolicy/recommend\\_new\\_admin.pdf](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/PublicPolicy/recommend_new_admin.pdf)