



CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2021

Sponsored by HELP Chair Patty Murray (D-WA) and Ranking Member Richard Burr (R-NC)

Preventing child abuse and neglect and protecting children at most serious risk of harm is a critical public health issue. Each year at least 1 in 7 children experiences child abuse or neglect, and in 2019 alone, more than 1,800 children died in the United States due to abuse and neglect. Meanwhile, a growing body of evidence supports the use of primary prevention to strengthen families, build protective factors against child abuse and neglect, and reduce the number of families in contact with the child protective services system.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many of the conditions that can put children at risk for abuse and neglect, including increases in familial stress, isolation, and economic insecurity. Research suggests that the percentage of emergency room visits due to child abuse and neglect resulting in hospitalization has increased during the pandemic. The child protective services system has a critical role to play in keeping children at risk of serious harm safe. However, punitive approaches to child protection and policy failures to distinguish between neglect and circumstances due to poverty have led to an overrepresentation of families of color and families with low incomes in the child protective services system. Additionally, nearly half of the calls made to child protection hotlines are screened out because such calls are likely not about issues related to child abuse and neglect.

This bill makes several improvements to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and the Adoption Opportunities Act. The bill supports States' efforts to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect before it occurs. The bill emphasizes the primary prevention of child abuse and neglect to help address issues of racial bias, reduce the number of unnecessary investigations by child protection, and better enable the child protective services system to focus on protecting children at the highest risk of child abuse and neglect.

Promotes a Trauma-Informed, Public Health Approach to Strengthen Families and Prevent, Reduce, and Treat Child Abuse and Neglect:

- Elevates the importance of primary prevention by encouraging the connection of families in need to voluntary, community-based family strengthening services through alternative pathways to safely reduce the number of families unnecessarily in contact with the child protective services system.
- Encourages the child protective services system to implement policies and procedures to rapidly respond to cases involving children at most serious risk of harm.
- Promotes strategies to reduce unnecessary investigations of families by the child protective services system solely based on circumstances related to poverty or housing status.
- Strengthens public transparency and accountability by making State data submission mandatory and improving annual reporting requirements.
- Promotes efforts to reduce racial bias and disparities in the child protective services system.
- Supports the use of evidence-based and evidence informed-practices to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect.
- Improves legal representation for children and parents in cases of child abuse and neglect that result in a judicial proceeding.
- Promotes a public health response for family care plans (formerly plans of safe care) to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of infants and their caregivers affected by substance use disorder.

- Improves the training, retention, and well-being of the child protective services workforce, including addressing secondary trauma.
- Promotes the use of trauma-informed practices in the investigation, and treatment of child abuse and neglect.
- Authorizes a 24-hour national child abuse hotline.
- Authorizes Capacity-Building Grants and Field-Initiated Innovation Grants to strengthen the child protection field.
- Increases authorization levels for CAPTA Title I to \$270 million for fiscal year 2022, and such sums as may be necessary for fiscal years 2023-2027.

Promotes the Development of a Continuum of Preventive Community-Based Family Strengthening Services:

- Supports States and community-based providers to provide prevention services to assist families in building protective factors linked to the prevention of child abuse and neglect.
- Ensures kinship caregiver families have access to community-based family strengthening services under CAPTA.
- Improves parental leadership and emphasizes the involvement of diverse populations in identifying and responding to community needs.
- Increases dedicated funding for Indian Tribes, Tribal organizations, and migrant populations for child abuse primary prevention.
- Authorizes \$270 million for Community Based Child Abuse Prevention programs (CB-CAP) for fiscal year 2022, and such sums as may be necessary for fiscal years 2023-2027.

Assists Accurate, Comparable, and Actionable Data Collection and Review of Child Fatalities and Near Fatalities Due to Child Abuse and Neglect:

- Promotes a public health approach to data collection and review of fatalities and near fatalities due to child abuse and neglect to promote data-driven, actionable reforms across State, Tribal, and local agencies to prevent such incidents in the future.
- Establishes a Federal Work Group to oversee the development of uniform public health data standards that are designed to promote consistent terminology and data collection related to child fatalities and near fatalities due to child abuse and neglect.
- Authorizes grant funding for States, Tribes, and Tribal organizations to support child death review programs, improve data collection and reporting related to child fatalities and near-fatalities, and implementation of systemic reforms to learn from such incidents and prevent their occurrence in the future.

Supports Adoption Opportunities and Permanency for Children Facing Systemic Barriers to Adoption:

- Supports adoption opportunities for children facing barriers to adoption and supports the recruitment of racially and ethnically diverse prospective adoptive parents.
- Supports adoption permanency through improved post-legal adoption services.
- Provides technical assistance to address and prevent unregulated custody transfers.
- Authorizes \$50 million for the Adoption Opportunities Act for fiscal year 2022, and such sums as may be necessary for fiscal years 2023-2027.