

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JUDD GREGG
ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE
“KEEPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SAFE ACT OF 2003
FEBRUARY 11, 2003

Mr. President, last year our nation was stunned by a videotape of a mother beating her 4 year old daughter in the parking lot of a shopping center. Yet the unfortunate fact is that each year, behind closed doors, close to one million children in the United States are abused or neglected and as a result, are in need of assistance and out-of-home care.

I am pleased today to be joined by Senators Kennedy, Dodd and Alexander, in introducing legislation aimed at reducing child abuse and neglect and mitigating its very damaging impact. The “Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003” reauthorizes four key programs designed to do just that.

First, we reauthorize the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), which provides grants to States to improve child protection systems and to support community-based family resource and support services. CAPTA also authorizes research and demonstration projects aimed at preventing and treating child abuse and neglect.

The last reauthorization of CAPTA in 1996 made significant changes in this program to better target limited federal resources and to enhance the ability of states to respond to the most serious cases of abuse and neglect. Unfortunately, the issues facing an overburdened child welfare system are seldom easily resolved. The Keeping Children and Families Safe Act will build upon previous changes to CAPTA, by enhancing the CPS workforce and continuing to ensure that children and families receive appropriate services and referrals.

Mr. President, the legislation my colleagues and I are introducing today encourages new training and better qualifications for child and family service workers. With this reauthorization, states can give additional training to CPS workers on how to best work with families from

the time that the CPS worker walks through the door of a home to the point of treatment for the child and family.

In 2000, CPS workers nationwide investigated 1.7 million cases of reported Child Abuse and Neglect. The environments in which CPS workers conduct these investigations can vary greatly in level of safety. With this legislation, states will be able to use federal dollars to provide some personal safety training for CPS workers for when they enter the home. Additionally, the rights of families are also addressed during the initial stages of investigation, by requiring CPS workers to inform individuals of child maltreatment allegations made against them.

During their investigations, CPS workers encounter a myriad of types of abuse. In 2000, approximately 63 percent of children who were victims of maltreatment suffered neglect, 19 percent suffered physical abuse, 10 percent suffered sexual abuse, and 8 percent suffered emotional maltreatment. In order to help ensure that cases of abuse and neglect are properly identified, States would be able to provide cross-training for CPS workers to help them better recognize neglect, domestic violence or substance abuse in a family. This bill would also enhance linkages between child protection services and education, health, mental health, and judicial systems. Further, it would encourage greater collaboration with the juvenile justice system to ensure that children who move between these two systems do so smoothly and receive the proper services.

As a condition of receiving state grant money, we ask states to have policies and procedures, including referral to CPS, to address the needs of infants who have been prenatally exposed to illegal substances. We also require States to perform background checks on all adults in prospective foster care households. Current law only requires that checks be performed on the prospective foster care parent.

Mr. President, we have all heard the horrific accounts in the media of those children who slip through the cracks of the child protective system. It is our hope that with this reauthorization, which includes an increase in authorization to \$200 million, we can help States to fill some of those cracks.

The second program we reauthorize is the Adoption Opportunities Act. This Act is intended to eliminate barriers to adoption and to provide permanent homes for children, particularly children who are hard to place, including children with special needs, older children, and disabled infants with life-threatening conditions.

With 131,000 children currently waiting for adoption, we must improve upon this program by seeking to further tear down barriers to adoption. Specifically - we are placing an increased emphasis on the elimination of inter-jurisdictional barriers to adoption.

This Act would require the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to fund public or private entities (including States) to develop a uniform home-study standard and protocols for acceptance of home-studies between States and jurisdictions. The Secretary would also help to facilitate cross-jurisdictional placements by developing models of financing, expanding capacity of all adoption exchanges to serve increasing numbers of children, training social workers on preparing and moving children across State lines, and developing and supporting models for networking among agencies, adoption exchanges, and parent support groups across jurisdictional boundaries.

Within one year of enactment, the bill would require the Department of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the General Accounting Office, to facilitate the inter-jurisdictional adoption of foster children. Additionally, the bill would also make inter-jurisdictional adoption issues B including financing and best practices B a part of a larger study HHS would be required to conduct on adoption placements. Current law generally allows HHS to fund services provided by public and nonprofit private agencies only. To help facilitate this process, we would double the current authorization for this title from \$20 million to \$40 million.

Third, the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003 reauthorizes the Abandoned Infants Assistance Act. This program authorizes demonstration grants to public and private nonprofit agencies

for activities aimed at preventing the abandonment of infants, identifying and addressing the needs of abandoned infants, and recruiting and training foster families for abandoned children.

Currently, grant recipients must ensure that priority for their services is given to abandoned infants and young children who are HIV-infected, perinatally exposed to HIV, or perinatally drug-exposed. This legislation, which includes an increase in authorization to \$45 million, would broaden priority for services to include abandoned infants and young children who have life threatening illnesses or other special medical needs.

Finally, we reauthorize the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), which assists in efforts to increase public awareness about family violence and provide immediate shelter and related assistance to victims of family violence and their children.

This reauthorization increases the authorization for the National Domestic Violence Hotline to \$5 million and establishes a National Domestic Violence Shelter Network to link domestic violence shelters and service providers and the National Domestic Violence Hotline on a confidential website. The website would provide a continuously updated list of shelter availability anywhere in the United States at any time and would provide comprehensive information describing the services each shelter provides such as medical, social and bilingual services. It would also provide internet access to shelters that do not have appropriate technology.

Mr. President, domestic violence and child abuse affect thousands upon thousands of families each year, often with tragic results. In the year 2000 alone, 1200 children died as a consequence of child abuse and neglect, 85 percent of whom were under the age of 6. We must continue our efforts to stem the tide of abuse to prevent these dreadful results. This legislation reauthorizes four programs that address the needs of some of our most at-risk children and families, and I urge my colleagues' support.