



March 16, 2017

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Chairman
House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers
Ranking Member
House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Trey Gowdy
Chairman
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism,
Homeland Security, and Investigations
6340 O'Neill Federal Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism,
Homeland Security, and Investigations
6340 O'Neill Federal Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives:

Too often we read about and watch heart-breaking news stories about young victims, child predators and the lengths they will go to reach a vulnerable child, and the adults and systems who failed to protect the young people in their care. These stories are backed up by sobering facts.

- Every year more than 3.6 million referrals are made to child protection agencies across the country involving more than 6.6 million young people.
- A referral of child abuse is made every 9 seconds and Child Protective Services responds to a report of sexual abuse every 9 minutes.
- 1 in 10 children in the United States will be sexually abused before they turn 18.

Youth-serving organizations have a responsibility to create safe, nurturing environments for the young people in their care. Our organizations, and many youth-serving organizations across the country, know how critical a thorough and quality background screening is in order to safe-guard the young people we support. This is why we stridently support the bipartisan, bicameral Child Protection Improvements Act (CPIA), H.R. 695, and thank the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations for holding today's important hearing on "Combatting Crimes Against Children." It is our hope that the Committee will support and advance CPIA this session.

CPIA would create a national system for access to FBI fingerprint background checks for screening potential volunteers and staff of organizations serving vulnerable populations, including children, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly.

Organizations providing critical services to youth must be able to effectively, affordably, and reliably screen their volunteers and employees to ensure they do not have an inappropriate criminal past that might endanger the young people we seek to help. FBI fingerprint background checks are the most complete and reliable means of checking an individual's criminal record,

and are the only type of background check that is truly available on a nationwide basis. Unfortunately, the current background check system is not universally accessible for youth-serving organizations. All FBI requests must go through state agencies, but only half of states allow a wide range of youth-serving organizations to access this critical screening tool. Even in states where FBI searches are accessible, they are often prohibitively expensive and time-consuming.

We know from the PROTECT Act Child Safety Pilot managed by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children that FBI searches provide information that is absolutely critical for screening youth-serving volunteers and employees. Results from the pilot showed that more than 6 percent of the more than 100,000 volunteers screened with FBI searches had criminal records of concern — including extremely serious crimes like child sexual abuse, cruelty to children, and even murder. In addition, more than 41 percent of individuals with criminal records had crimes in states other than where they were applying to volunteer — meaning that only a nationwide check would have revealed these serious criminal offenses.

CPIA would build on the lessons learned through the Child Safety Pilot and finally solve this problem for youth-serving organizations of all kinds and in all states. The bill creates a streamlined and efficient way for youth-serving organizations to access FBI fingerprint checks at a reasonable cost with optimized turnaround time.

We fully support H.R. 695, the Child Protection Improvements Act (CPIA), and are eager to see this budget neutral and bipartisan bill advance through Congress during the 115th Congress. Thank you again for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Rosenberg".

Tom Rosenberg, President and CEO, American Camps Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Shapiro".

David Shapiro, President and CEO, MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Washington".

Kevin Washington, President and CEO, YMCA of the USA

CC: Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations

Representative Mike Bishop
Representative Adam Schiff