



September 21, 2017

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Senator Lee and Representative Perry, members of the committee:

Unfortunately I am unable to attend the interim committee meeting tomorrow because of previous commitments but I thought I'd share some prevention information to add to the record. Thank you for the opportunity.

As the Director of the Idaho Children's Trust Fund, I see it as my responsibility to focus at least some of your and the public's attention on how we can prevent child abuse and neglect before it occurs. While it is critical that as a society we make sure that children are not in harm's way, it is also critical that we learn how to provide the safe, stable and nurturing environments and relationships that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says are the essential elements for all children to thrive. Providing safe, stable and nurturing environments for all kids in Idaho must be our collective goal. Too many of our resources go to mitigate the consequences of abuse and neglect when we fail to prevent them.

I recently attended the annual federal grantees meeting for programs providing child welfare and prevention services. The new Commissioner for the Administration of Children, Youth and Families at the federal level, Jerry Milner, laid out his priorities by saying that "Strengthening families is primary." He asked "If our system is not doing that, what are we doing?" He next made this bold statement: "Our current system is set up to get exactly the results it gets, i.e. more children in foster care." Then he went on to say that more foster homes is not the answer. "This is not a supply problem; it's a demand problem." We need to stem demand.

Then he proposed five focuses for a revamped child welfare system as follows:

1. Change focus to *primary prevention* of maltreatment. He is not as focused on recurrence. He acknowledged that the current funding structure does not support that and that it will require a monumental change in the system and in mindset.
2. When foster care is necessary it needs to support families not be a substitute. Wherever possible it should be a shared responsibility with the birth parent(s). Foster care should serve as a support for the family and that must be an *expectation*.
3. Focus on the *wellbeing* of children and families. While safety will always remain important, practice needs to focus more on reducing trauma rather than creating it. One piece of that is to keep children in their communities as much as possible.
4. We need to refocus on building the capacity of communities to support families. He cited Live Well in San Diego and Casey Family Programs' efforts to build Communities of Hope.

5. Focus on the workforce which he described as “traumatized.” We need to support a stable and resilient workforce.

His thoughts are, I believe in alignment with much of what has been discussed at your table from a variety of perspectives.

Another group of experts from a variety of disciplines has recently authored a paper entitled ‘Balancing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) with HOPE (Health Outcomes of Positive Experience). The paper proposes that building protective factors and promoting positive experiences in children’s lives will mitigate the impacts of trauma when they occur and will promote optimum child and family development. In their conclusion, they state that

The implications for a better understanding of the factors that allow children and families to thrive are potentially game-changing. For example, we can reduce the need to place children in foster care if there are policies in place that address income and housing needs, treat mental illness, and support parents as they adopt positive parenting approaches. Family supports can come from many sectors, both formal and informal: friends, family, nonprofit social and human services organizations, child care providers, schools, and the health care, business, faith, and law enforcement communities. Foster parents can help children in their care thrive by extending their responsibility from simply ensuring physical safety to including those parenting approaches that allow children to have positive experiences.(Sege, Robert MD, PhD, et al. 2017, Casey Family Programs)

These conclusions jibe too with strategies promoted by the CDC to prevent child abuse and neglect which include: strengthening economic supports for families, changing social norms to support parents and positive parenting, providing quality care and education early in life, and enhancing parenting skills to promote healthy child development.

Communities and community-based services are providing many of these supports for families throughout Idaho but not at the scale they need to be provided. Some examples:

1. Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program which provides federal funding to all the public health districts in Idaho to provide either Nurse Family Partnership or Parents as Teachers home visiting programs statewide;
2. Over 14,000 adults throughout Idaho have been trained on how to prevent child sexual abuse through the Stewards of Children program;



3. Nurturing Parenting, Active Parenting, Fatherhood Initiative and other parent education and support programs are being provided in various places throughout the state;
4. Training around building protective factors, the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study and brain development are being provided to schools, juvenile justice programs and other community institutions to impact practice;
5. The films Paper Tigers and Resilience have been shown to thousands of people statewide through the combined efforts of Optum, the Speedy Foundation, Federation of Families and the Children's Trust Fund;
6. The legislature's efforts to provide community based mental health services are having an impact and should bear fruit;
7. Child Advocacy Centers and Domestic Violence programs throughout the state are increasing their role in prevention;
8. All birthing hospitals have adopted "The Crying Plan" to help parents cope with crying, the primary trigger causing shaken baby syndrome.

While all of these programs and projects are effective in raising public awareness and giving people prevention tools, none of them is large enough to have the depth of impact it would need to completely eliminate abuse and neglect of children. As you work towards some reforms of the systems that provide for child well-being, please keep in mind the work to prevent the abuse and neglect from happening in the first place.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger S. Sherman", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Roger Sherman
Executive Director