



April 16, 2020

Dear Governor Pritzker:

Illinois has 40 Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) serving child victims of sexual abuse and other maltreatment in nearly all of the state's counties. These CACs continue their vital operations as this pandemic of the novel coronavirus impacts every facet of our communities. The forensic interviews CACs provide to child victims are mandated by law and are critical components to high-priority criminal and child protection investigations, which will not stop in the midst of this outbreak. Serving more than 14,000 children annually along with law enforcement and DCFS partners across the state, Children's Advocacy Centers' front-line work is essential to the protection of Illinois children.

Research indicates child sexual abuse thrives in isolation. The need for child sexual abuse investigations will undoubtedly grow as we see families experience necessary long-term isolation from the social services they normally lean on for support, including schools.

Right now, vulnerable children are not spending time with mandated reporters, such as teachers or staff from youth-serving organizations, and may have no one to speak up for them as abuse continues. In addition to the reports that continue to be made to DCFS, we anticipate a spike in reports when children return to school. We are calling on the state of Illinois to ensure that Children's Advocacy Centers are able to keep their doors open to intervene and protect these children alongside our partners. CACs are, and will continue to be, an essential safety net regardless of what unfolds over the next few months.

Your support is urgently needed to ensure that Children's Advocacy Centers are able to meet the needs of abused children, now and in the future. **We are calling on our leaders to advocate for increased funding for CACs, including the addition of a dedicated appropriation to Children's Advocacy Centers in the Illinois state budget.** While COVID-19 may halt key fundraising events, it will not stop child sexual abuse. The loss of revenue from canceled fundraising opportunities now will be devastating to CACs in the long-term. CACs need a dedicated appropriation in the budget to ensure the sustainability of our work. While critical to the operations of CACs, funding from DCFS has not been able to keep pace with the increase in services experienced over the last decade. **An appropriation of \$10 million will provide much-needed funding for CACs** to offset the administrative costs required to meet the increased demand for services, and to ensure that we remain capable of protecting all Illinois' children.

Even in this time of crisis and uncertainty, Children's Advocacy Centers across the state continue to work to protect our most vulnerable children. Your advocacy is needed now more than ever.

Sincerely,

Kim Mangiaracino
Executive Director
Children's Advocacy Centers of Illinois