



CORE POLICY AND ADVOCACY PLATFORM

INTRODUCTION: Chicago Children's Advocacy Center (ChicagoCAC) and our partners are the front-line responders in Chicago to reports of child sexual abuse. ChicagoCAC also responds to cases of physical abuse, witness to violence, trafficking, and other serious child maltreatment. Since opening in 2001 we have served more than 45,000 children. ChicagoCAC also annually educates thousands of adults in sexual abuse prevention best practices and promotes prevention education and policy advocacy related to our work in Chicago and across Illinois.

The following is an insight into what guides ChicagoCAC's policy decisions. It is intended to be general rather than an endorsement of specific bills or initiatives. If you have questions about any of these principles or would like to discuss collaboration, please contact us at info@chicagocac.org.

OUR CORE VALUES

- Freedom from abuse and exploitation is a basic human right.
- The center is a safe place for everyone who enters its doors.
- The collaborative process is the best approach to prevent and respond to child abuse.
- Our children and families deserve to receive the highest standard of care available.
- Best-practice interventions can restore lives.

OUR POLICY WORK PRIORITIZES CHILD SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE/HARM: ChicagoCAC is committed to serving children who have been sexually abused, exploited, or trafficked. We promote freedom from abuse and violence as a human right; we know that abuse occurs in all neighborhoods and communities and impacts people from all demographic categories regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, and/or disability status.

We also know that not all neighborhoods and communities have historically had the same access to resources. Therefore, we support legislation and policies that prioritize victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and sexual harm, regardless of when or how they disclose the abuse, with a focus on equitable and inclusive service delivery. We support policies that promote the prevention of sexual abuse and expand our ability to do prevention and intervention work that aims to end violence against children, including policies addressing children with problematic sexual behavior.

In addition, we support policy and legislation that improves the criminal justice system for child victims, including ensuring victims are protected from the trauma caused by the investigative process itself.

WE STRIVE TO BE A TRAUMA-INFORMED ENVIRONMENT: Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) provide a unique, indispensable service with their trauma-informed approach to hope and healing after abuse. Very few CACs are able to co-locate investigative partners, but ChicagoCAC was conceived as a fully co-located agency and has maintained that approach to streamline the investigative process and

lessen its traumatic impact for children and families. Therefore, we support policies that enable and enhance our abilities to provide trauma-informed environments and allow us to maintain and expand our physical space to serve more families.

We work to keep our doors open regardless of the challenges we face, and to make sure that we are always able to respond to the needs of abused children, especially as these needs increase. We advocate for support of vital funding for ChicagoCAC and other CACs in Illinois to remain an accessible, trauma-informed environment and infrastructure to support children, caregivers and providers alike.

COLLABORATION IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR APPROACH: ChicagoCAC's service model values the collaborative process as the best approach to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and other trauma, and we support policies and protocols that enhance team approaches. Working under one roof with our multidisciplinary team—which includes DCFS, the Chicago Police Department's Special Investigations Unit, Cook County State's Attorney's Office, and Lurie Children's Hospital—we investigate alleged abuse, conduct forensic interviews, and provide family advocacy. Through our Family Hope Center and PATHH Collaboration, we offer mental health support and identify resources that may help families begin the healing process. We co-founded the Chicago Prevention Alliance to bring together the expertise and resources of organizations working to implement prevention strategies to end sexual harm against or by children and youth. We support policies and legislation that would improve the services we offer in a holistic way, honoring the contributions of all multidisciplinary team partners.

We also build coalitions outside of our agency to inform our policy work. We work closely with Children's Advocacy Centers of Illinois and often partner with other nonprofits and advocacy groups to help pass legislation that will profoundly impact the lives of children and families for the better.

FAMILIES DESERVE BEST PRACTICE CARE: ChicagoCAC supports legislation that ensures families are served using evidence-informed approaches in multiple fields, including child abuse investigations, prevention education and mental health treatment. We support legislation that mandates investigative work is done in a manner consistent with best practice and in the best interest of victims. We support policies that work to provide children with developmentally appropriate information about sexual health, prevention, and consent. And we support policies that offer our families greater access to evidence-based mental health services that can help them thrive beyond their recent trauma.

WE ADVOCATE FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION: We believe that the diversity of our communities is a fundamental strength of our city, and our mission is best fulfilled when we prioritize policy activities that contribute to equity and inclusion for child survivors of sexual harm. Achieving this requires an enduring commitment to examining policies with the most marginalized and under-resourced communities in mind. Leading by example, we aspire to make diversity, equity and inclusion core and abiding strengths of the children's advocacy center movement. We do this by acknowledging and addressing the reality of systemic racism, inherent biases that affect investigations, and ongoing inequities in our world impacting survivors of child sexual abuse.