Science and the Safety of Children

Please see the attached articles that I wrote regarding the dire need for a greater initiative from the scientific community to advocate for maltreated children in the United States and how it is related to the latest research in neuroscience.

Thank you,

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# CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT: EFFECTS ON THE BRAIN AND A CALL FOR ACTION

David A. Cooperson, MSW, MA, LCSW

When I retired after more than 30 years with the Philadelphia Department of Human Services working with abused and neglected children, I realized my work had just begun. In the years that I spent as a social worker, supervisor, and administrator, I learned that neither the public nor many professionals were sufficiently aware of the effect of abuse and neglect on the developing child's brain. An explosion of research over the past two decades has shown that significant abuse and neglect can have devastating effects on one's neurological circuits, laying the groundwork for severe mental and physical health problems in the future. Today, I believe the real work lies in convincing social workers that they not only have a responsibility to stay up-to-date on such literature, but also have a duty to educate others about this subject.

## What the Research Says

In their book, *Neurobiology for Clinical Social Work: Theory and Practice*, Applegate and Shapiro (2005) strongly recommend that social work schools add new courses covering the latest developments in neuroscience. They discuss the wealth of recent research demonstrating that undue stress and abuse on children affect brain growth and functioning. Cozolino (2006) also discusses some of the following neurological effects of abuse and neglect that have been demonstrated using techniques such as PET scanning:

- The amygdala, which regulates anger and fear, does not grow fully.
- The hippocampus, which regulates learning and memory, does not develop properly.
- Cortisol hormone levels fluctuate, which makes things more difficult in stressful situations and can impair and destroy nerve endings in the brain.
- The corpus callosum, which facilitates communication between the left and right sides of the brain, malfunctions.

The dire chronic health problems that result from these changes in the brain were examined in an initiative called the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study (Felitti, 2002). Vincent Felitti, MD, and co-principal investigator Robert Anda, MD, followed thousands of people over a period of 10 years and found that high percentages of those with severe mental illness, substance abuse disorders, and violent criminal behavior had, among other traumatic experiences, histories of being repeatedly physically, sexually, and/or emotionally abused as children. Other long-term health effects related to such abuse included suicidal behavior, heart and pulmonary problems, and numerous physical illnesses. Through their extensive research, Felliti and Anda found that abuse and neglect were not only jeopardizing children's futures, but also creating a major public health issue.

## A Call to Action

National public health campaigns abound in this country, highlighting everything from the effects of smoking on the lungs to the effects of cholesterol on the heart. I believe a national campaign focused on the potentially devastating effects of child abuse and neglect would be in the best interests of some of our most vulnerable clients: children.

Although numerous researchers and agencies do incredible work and have extensive knowledge about such effects, there has been no unified effort to present this information to the public in a cohesive way. Not too long ago, I asked more than 80 experts and agencies about their perception of the dissemination of research on this subject. Without exception, those who responded affirmed the need for a unified national campaign.

I have, with much assistance, begun the process of launching such an endeavor. I have networked with established agencies and experts and have had some success in reaching out to media outlets as well.

If coordinated properly, this campaign could affect how professionals approach child abuse investigations and even enhance their therapeutic efforts. For example, Applegate and Shapiro (2005) explain that because the brain has some plasticity, timely therapy using techniques addressing the emotional dysregulation that comes with abuse can prevent some of its more serious, long-term effects. A grasp of the brain's response to abuse and neglect also could help social workers better understand and treat attachment issues including reactive attachment disorder (Cozolino, 2006).

## Potential Obstacles

Getting this national campaign off the ground will not be without its obstacles. Efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect have been met with much resistance from the public and politicians (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2002). There are still 22 states that permit corporal punishment in schools, indicating a lack of knowledge or concern about the effects of child abuse on the future health of children.

Such laws highlight the fact that the United States is far less progressive in its attitude toward child abuse when compared with many other countries. Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Israel, Latvia, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine, and most of the rest of Europe have banned corporal punishment for children. The United Nations' (UN) 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which takes a strong position against abuse, neglect, and other forms of child maltreatment, has been ratified by 193 of 195 UN members (United Nations, 2006). The United States and Somalia are the only members that have declined to ratify the treaty to this day.

## A Challenge to Social Workers

If anyone can overcome these obstacles, it is social workers, who long have been at the forefront of combating child abuse. In Murray Strauss's book, *Beating the Devil out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families* (1994), he refers to a 1989 conference led by Adrienne Haeuser, a social work professor. Strauss writes:

> Following the conference, several major organizations adopted positions opposing corporal punishment by parents including Parents Anonymous, the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse, the National Foster Parent Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the National Association of Social Workers (Strauss, 1994, p.171).

NASW took this stance well before researchers had learned about the long-lasting effects of abuse on the brain. Armed with this new knowledge, social workers are in a better position to advocate for stricter legal standards and work to prevent child mistreatment on a macro and micro level. Training and therapeutic programs for parents, for example, must include information about the potential for permanent brain damage due to abuse and neglect.

The social work profession has long used research to help promote the welfare of children and other vulnerable populations. It is now time for a national campaign to show that neurological damage due to abuse and neglect threatens both children and the general well-being of our nation.

**David A. Cooperson, MSW, MA, LCSW,** retired in 2005 after 32 years as a social worker, supervisor, and administrator with the Philadelphia Department of Human Services. He can be contacted at dacooperson@yahoo.com

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# CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, SOCIAL WORK VALUES, AND CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

David Cooperson, MSW, MA, LCSW

Social workers have a powerful values and ethics base, which undoubtedly calls for the opposition of corporal punishment. Corporal punishment, in most terms, is a scourge that presents serious injustice and danger for children. The practice of corporal punishment in schools has produced a litany of injuries and, ultimately, the humiliation of children. Defended by laws that often provide immunity from legal remedies, the use of corporal punishment on children in schools has a singular distinction–no other category of human beings in the U.S. is permitted to be physically beaten without legal protection, including prisoners on death row. So why then is it sanctioned for children?

## What's Happening Around the Issue

In June 2009, a march opposing corporal punishment in schools occurred in Washington, D.C. While there are a few grassroots organizations utilizing the principles of advocacy to fight against the practice of corporal punishment in schools, the state of Indiana passed a law granting educators legal immunity in disciplining children, as recently as May 2009. In fact, today there are 20 states that legally permit the physical punishment of children with a wooden paddle, other implement, or by hand. Sadly, minority and disabled children are overrepresented amongst children paddled in schools.

Children from hundreds of member states of the United Nations are represented by the Children's Bill of Rights, originally drafted in 1996 by several hundred children from around the world and ratified by their own countries. Yet another international form of the Children's Bill of Rights—the Convention on the Rights of the Child, originally adopted by the United Nations in 1989—is not supported by the U.S. In fact, the U.S. and Somalia remain the only two nations who have not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which advocates that children should not be mistreated for any purpose, including being

*Children's Rights, continued on page 8)*

*Child Welfare*

SectionConnection

A NEWSLETTER OF THE NASW SPECIALTY PRACTICE SECTIONS

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(Children's Rights, continued from page 2)

subject to corporal punishment in schools. At the end of November 2009, however, Somalia announced that it will join the child rights pact, leaving the U.S. as the last remaining hold-out. Additionally, the provision to stop corporal punishment in the home is also followed by almost every country in Europe. Experts in the fields of psychiatry, medicine, and social work continue to openly oppose all forms of corporal punishment in schools and in homes.

Of those who experience corporal punishment in the home, the youngest and smallest in stature are most often the victims. According to Sunderland (2008), research demonstrates that 75 percent of parents hit one-year olds, 91 percent of parents hit toddlers, and 10 percent of parents beat with implements. Confusing advice abounds by proponents of spanking. The American Academy of Pediatrics rejects spanking/corporal punishment of children for emotional and physical safety.

Proponents of spanking present confusing and often contradictory advice on whether a child should be hit with an implement or a hand or whether pain should be associated with spanking. They also disagree with one another on other points such as:

- the ages that a child should be spanked
- whether spanking should only be used as a last resort
- when it is not appropriate to beat a child according to a parent's and child's emotional state and environment

## The Dangers of Corporal Punishment

Legal expert Barbara Bennett Woodhouse (2008) has worked hand-in-hand with social workers and medical professionals at the University of Pennsylvania's Field Center, expressing the social work ethical principles of dignity and equality for all children. In her written work, she powerfully argues that it is dangerous for children's rights to be denied.

Some of the dangers of corporal punishment are even demonstrated by proponents of corporal punishment. Such is the case with Matthew Israel, a Harvard-trained psychologist, who works with autistic children and young adults. While he approved the use of corporal punishment at the institution he runs, he had assistants follow rules and guidelines about how to spank. However, the children often moved while being spanked, which resulted in unintended injuries. Recognizing spanking as a possible danger and rather than abolishing corporal punishment all together, Israel changed the rules and guidelines to include electric shock as a form of acceptable punishment within the institution.

Hope for change does exist, as many professionals are changing their stance on corporal punishment. Russell Barkley, distinguished researcher on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and aggression in children, changed his position from pro-spanking to anti-spanking, based on the overwhelming research linking corporal punishment with increased child aggression.

Unfortunately, many parents are unaware of the research and use pro-spanking, "expert" theories to justify corporal punishment. The same is true for some foster parents who fervently oppose state laws that prohibit hitting foster children and cite pro-spanking experts and their theories as a basis for their opposition. Of course, foster parents who do not reconsider their stance on corporal punishment are rejected for state licensure.

Injuries resulting from spanking can be hidden by parents who learn how to hit without leaving a bruise, wishing to avoid state child abuse laws. For example, I once worked with a handicapped child whose parent wrapped a towel around a

pipe when she beat him with it in order to avoid leaving bruises on his body. It was only after internal injuries occurred that the abuse was detected. In my 32 years as a social worker, supervisor, and administrator in child welfare, I encountered countless episodes of children *severely* hurt by parents who said they *merely* spanked their children and that spanking (in their minds) was not against the law.

With all of the current research on the subject, it is surprising that some still cling to the tenants of corporal punishment so strongly. One graduate student from a major school of social work, who attended a workshop I presented in 2008, reported that she was quite upset that the majority of students in her child development classes were in favor of corporal punishment in the home.

## What Can Be Done?

One of the barriers to changing public and parental views regarding corporal punishment is that the public and many professionals are not up-to-date on the mountain of compelling research developed over the past 25 years concerning the effects of spanking. This enormous body of research supports the ratification of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, which opposes *any* form of corporal punishment of children.

McCall and Groarck (2000, p. 197) highlighted the need for professionals to spread the message against corporal punishment. Academics were "urged to broaden their audience from a nearly exclusive focus on other academics to a focus on the three *ps*: practioners, policymakers, and the public. ...it is suggested that applied child developmental research should...disseminate results more vigorously." Many researchers, in fact, connect corporal punishment and spanking with poor academic achievement, deficits in career development, and increased violence among children.

The social work profession must actively advocate against any corporal punishment of children. Adrienne Hauser, a social work professor at the University of Wisconsin led the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in their official stance of opposition to corporal punishment over 20 ago–*before* a mountain of evidence regarding the effects of child maltreatment on the brain, and long-term health even existed. Twenty years ago, social workers were guided by their "code of ethics" to oppose corporal punishment in schools and in the home. Today, social workers must continue this legacy to adhere to the *Code* and advocate for the protection and safety of *all* children.

**David Cooperson, MSW, MA, LCSW, was an administrator, supervisor, and social worker with the Philadelphia Department of Human Services Child Abuse and Neglect Agency for 32 years, and worked part-time as an individual and family therapist for 20 years. He can be reached at dacooperson@yahoo.com.**

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PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

BY DAVID COOPERSON MSW, MA, LCSW
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# Advocacy for Children Backed by the Latest Science Needed Now More Than Ever

I recently wrote an article "Child Abuse and Neglect: Effect on the Brain and a Call to Action" in the Specialty Practice Sections, *Child Welfare Connection*, Issue 2, 2007. To summarize, over the past twenty years there has been an explosion of research that demonstrates that too often child abuse and neglect and other forms of maltreatment cause extreme stress that damages children's developing brains and ongoing health. Applegate and Shapiro at one of Pennsylvania's own social work schools, Bryn Mawr, have written a book *Neuroscience for Clinical Social Work: Theory and Practice* (2005) and have strongly advocated for social work schools to develop classes for social workers to learn about the latest advances in this science to help their clients.

I believe the following information is crucial. Dire damage often occurs not only to the brain structures and functions, but affects long-term health such that life expectancy may be shortened. The good news is that if diagnosed early enough therapies exist which can help reverse this consequence as the brain, especially in the early stages, is plastic and malleable. Some resilient children escape this occurrence, but the costs are too high for countless children who are affected. Numerous respected researchers have copious evidence to demonstrate these effects. Parts of the brain that regulate learning and memory (hippocampus), regulation of anger and fear (amygdala), and communication between the hemispheres (corpus callusosum) do not grow fully. Cortisol is overproduced and causes serious negative effects to blood pressure, metabolism, storage of fat, sugar levels and destroys brain cells. This, according to a decade long study by Felitti and Anda often leads to serious heart problems, obesity, alcoholism, and a greater probability of suicide. Intense mental health problems are much more likely and the effects of post traumatic stress disorder can emerge years later. Educational achievement is also effected. This has an effect most importantly on the well being of children, but costs billions of dollars in health care and lost opportunities.

From 32 years as an administrator, supervisor, social worker, and therapist, I believed that the public and many professionals lack this information. To test this assumption I contacted 80 researchers and agencies nationwide and all that responded agreed without exception that there needs to be a national campaign to educate the public on this crucial issue. Despite the incredible work of the researchers, the information disseminated is piecemeal. Times have been difficult over the last 10 years according to the American Academy of Pediatrics to move forward in prevention efforts for children as there has been public and political backlash about ongoing efforts to protect children's rights. There are 21 states where it still is legal for school personnel to reprimand children by spanking or paddling them with a wooden object. There is a man in Pennsylvania who manufactures wooden paddles and sends them to parents or schools to punish children and many of his neighbors volunteer for free to help him. The National Association of Social Workers almost 20 years ago signed a pact with many other human service groups advocating that corporal punishment be banned. (This was before this scientific evidence was established). The United Nations has a Bill of Rights for Children to protect them in this regard which out of 195 countries only the United States and Somalia have not ratified. Almost every other country in Europe and many parts of the world have banned corporal punishment totally.

NASW has long been an advocate to protect children and now there is greatly increased scientific evidence to support such an effort. The greatest advocates anywhere — social workers — need to be involved in this process. ❁

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# Voices In The Family



November 2006

**11/06/06**
**Child Abuse**
Listen via Real Audio | mp3

Recently, we have heard terrifying news about children dying because of abuse in the Delaware Valley. But what happens to the children who survive abuse and neglect? An estimated three million children in the US are abused and neglected each year, but this number is likely an underestimate, since many cases are not reported to state agencies. Research suggests that neglect and abuse affects the development of a child's brain, and can lead to severe mental and physical illness. Dan Gottlieb and his guests will discuss the long-term effects of child abuse and neglect, and what can be done to help these children. Our guests are Dr. Paul Fink and David Cooperson. Fink is professor of psychiatry at Temple Medical School, and president of the leadership council on child abuse and interpersonal violence. David Cooperson is a retired child welfare administrator and social worker for the city of Philadelphia. We'll also hear excerpts from our interview with author Stephen Elliott, who writes about surviving childhood abuse in his book "Happy Baby."

**11/13/06**
**Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**
Listen via Real Audio | mp3

About 4 million children live with their grandparents. According to U.S. census data, grandparents raise 6% of our nation's children and the number is growing rapidly. Dan Gottlieb and his guests will take a look at the role of grandparents, and how it changes when they take the place of parents. We'll hear about the challenges, the rewards, and the legal situation. Our guests are Dr. Nadine Bean and Lawrence "Skip" Persick. Bean is associate professor in the Master of Social Work Program at West Chester University, she conducted interviews with grandparents across America over a two-year period. Persick is partner at the law firm of Lamb McErlane in West Chester, PA.

**11/20/06**
**Gratitude**
Listen via Real Audio | mp3

"Happy Thanksgiving" should really be three words. But - how can we think about what we're grateful for when we're busy cleaning the house, shopping, cooking and smoothing over family troubles? This edition of Voices in the Family will be an open show, we'll discuss gratitude, what it means, and if we can learn it. Call in with your questions and stories!

**11/27/06**
**Women and Healthcare**
Listen via Real Audio | mp3

Historically, women have been misunderstood and often misdiagnosed by doctors. Are things better today? Women are underrepresented in clinical trials, and many women are still told "it's hormonal" when they seek advice for a problem. Dan Gottlieb and his guests will discuss women and healthcare. We'll be joined by Dr. Karen Bowles, Phyllis Greenberger and Deborah Kotz. Kotz is a senior editor in the Health section at U.S.News & World Report covering women's health issues, the FDA and the pharmaceutical industry. Karen Bowles is clinical assistant professor of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, and practices Internal medicine. Phyllis Greenberger, MSW, is president and CEO of the Society for Women's Health Research.



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February 17, 2011
Volume 229 Issue 20
EXPONENT

## Israel Can Help Many See the Light About Kids

I read with great interest the article about Israel assisting China in handling child abuse and neglect (Health & Science: "Hands-Off Training," Feb. 10).

About 35 years ago Haim Ginot, a pioneer Israeli psychologist, wrote in Between Parent and Child about physical punishment of children. He said "children are not for hitting." He is revered by all those who spend our careers helping kids.

Since then, Israel has made corporal punishment illegal in school and at home, based on more than 20 years of research on the adverse effects of child maltreatment on the developing brain.

Israel could also help the United States since, believe it or not, physical punishment in schools, including hitting with a wooden paddle, is legal in 20 states. Countless children have been seriously injured, many of them minority children.

***David Cooperson***
*Cheltenham*

## Soviet Jewry Came Under the Umbrella of JCRC

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EXPONENT
February 10, 2011
Volume 229 Issue 19



JOSEPH Levine & SONS

# Hands-Off Training

**Israeli pediatricians offer expertise to Chinese**

February 10, 2011 - Dina Kraft, Jewish Telegraphic Agency

**Tel Aviv** An Israeli team of pediatricians traveled to central China recently to deliver an unexpected export: know-how in detecting and treating cases of child abuse and neglect to the world's most populous country.

Pediatricians are now considered part of the frontline effort to combat child abuse and neglect. In weeklong workshops, the Israelis trained their Chinese counterparts, who gathered from around the country in Xi'an, a city of 10 million people in central China.

"We taught them how to identify cases of abuse, specifically how to differentiate a medical problem from an abuse problem. It's not easy, but there are signs and symptoms that are indicative of abusive trauma," said Yoram Ben-Yehuda, head of emergency pediatric medicine at Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem. "You need to know when to suspect something is wrong and how to ask the questions, what kind of injuries should be suspected, what kind of history should seem suspect."

### Collaboration With Professionals

The idea was to begin the training of pediatricians in China to serve as experts in the field of detecting and treating child abuse and neglect (itself a sub-speciality in the United States) who will then be able to transmit their knowledge and new tools to colleagues throughout the country, so they, too, will know how to best take necessary action.

Ben-Yehuda was part of the team sent to China by the Jerusalem-based Haruv Institute, which works to spread knowledge about child abuse and neglect, as well as their prevention and treatment.

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"The Chinese have recently realized that the role pediatricians play is a very integral one in fighting child abuse, and often, they will be the first place a child will go after being hurt," said Hillel Schmid, director of the Haruv Institute.

"Our goal is to expand our reach and to deepen our collaboration with the professional community in China, to share with them the knowledge and skills we obtained in Israel to fight this phenomenon," added Schmid.

In Israel, awareness of the problem of child abuse and neglect has grown tremendously in recent years. Several high-profile cases have riveted the country, perhaps none other than a story two summers ago in which a 4-year-old girl named Rose from Netanya was found dead, her body stuffed in a suitcase and tossed in a river, allegedly by her abusive grandfather.

Israeli pediatricians have become better at collecting more information, with the goal of helping halt the cycle of abuse and neglect.

The tragic story of Rose, for example, was considered to have been the result of both an abused and neglected child, known in her neighborhood for wandering alone in the streets.

Neglect, Ben-Yehuda said, is one of the more neglected fields in medicine, as doctors have been slow to realize it, too, is a medical condition. Clues to neglect can be a child dressed inappropriately for the weather, a failure for him or her to gain weight or join in school activities, and a lack of medical attention when sick.

"The spectrum is very wide, and unfortunately, it's one of the most neglected fields in medicine because many physicians don't think it's a health problem or disease, but rather a social problem, so they ignore it," he said. "What I am trying to convince pediatricians in Israel and China is that neglect is actually a medical problem. It is a childhood illness because the signs, symptoms and effects put the child's health at risk and could even kill them."

Ben-Yehuda also dismissed the notion that child abuse or neglect would be less of a problem in a society like China, which has a one-child-per-family rule. He said that there is no evidence that abuse or neglect is linked to the amount of children in a family.

Ben-Yehuda said he was surprised that, despite vast cultural differences between Israel and China, the Chinese pediatricians were so open about their own challenges, and eager to receive training.

Haruv has plans to continue taking the Israeli experience abroad and train a smaller group of physicians who would then go and hold their own workshops, spreading the word among their colleagues.

Among the areas in which they hope to hold workshops are some of the less developed countries in Eastern Europe, along with countries in southeast Asia and Africa.

"It comes down to pediatricians being in a very good position to diagnose child abuse first" and help educate parents, explained Ben-Yehuda.

"If pediatricians are knowledgeable about signs and symptoms, they can diagnose the problem before a child is severely affected by abuse or neglect," he added.

"Many times abuse and neglect are not just because the parents are bad parents, but because the parents are ignorant. Educating the parents can have a major effect on preventing abuse in the first place."

## GovTrack.us

We've begun work on a GovTrack 2.0 . . . Previews in April 2011 . . . Stay tuned for details . . .

Congress > Legislation

# H.R. 5628: Ending Corporal Punishment in Schools Act

111th Congress
2009-2010

To end the use of corporal punishment in schools, and for other purposes.

### Overview

Rep. Carolyn McCarthy [D-NY4] **show cosponsors (24)**

Summary | Full Text

| | |
|---|---|
| ☑ Introduced | Jun 29, 2010 |
| ☑ Referred to Committee | View Committee Assignments |
| | (did not occur) |
| | (did not occur) |
| | (did not occur) |
| | (did not occur) |

**This bill never became law.** This bill was proposed in a previous session of Congress. Sessions of Congress last two years, and at the end of each session all proposed bills and resolutions that haven't passed are cleared from the books. Members often reintroduce bills that did not come up for debate under a new number in the next session.

Oct 13, 2010: House Committee on Education and Labor: Referred to the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities.

See the Related Legislation page for other bills related to this one and a list of subject terms that have been applied to this bill. Sometimes the text of one bill or resolution is incorporated into another, and in those cases the original bill or resolution, as it would appear here, would seem to be abandoned.

### Question & Answer

Have a question about this bill? Submit a short fact-oriented question and see if it will be answered by other visitors.

### Subject Areas

## Rep. McCarthy Introducing Bill Banning Corporal Punishment in Schools

Wednesday September 21, 2011

# Bill Banning Corporal Punishment in Schools To Be Introduced in Congress

### *19 States Still Allow School Personnel to Beat Students*

### *3 Out of 4 Americans Oppose the Practice*

WASHINGTON, DC (Sept. 21, 2011) – Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY4), a nurse who has put a heavy emphasis on public health and safety issues since joining Congress in 1997, will on Thursday introduce the "Ending Corporal Punishment in Schools Act," legislation that aims to end the practice of children being struck or beaten in schools by school personnel.

"There are two Americas out there for young students right now – one where they go to school knowing that they'll be guided positively by caring adults, and one where they live in constant fear of getting beaten," said Rep. McCarthy, a member of the Committee on Education and Workforce. "Bullying is enough of a problem among students; the teachers shouldn't be doing it, too. There's nothing positive or productive about corporal punishment and it should be discouraged everywhere."

According to the latest data from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, from the 2006-2007 school year, over 200,000 students are the victims of corporal punishment every year. African American children and children with disabilities experience corporal punishment at disproportionately high rates. In the case of the latter, many are punished simply for behaviors arising out of their disabilities, such as autism or Tourette's syndrome.

According to polling done in all 50 states by SurveyUSA in 2005, only 23 percent of Americans believe it's okay for teachers to hit students.

The Ending Corporal Punishment in Schools Act enforces its ban by allowing the Education Secretary to withhold funds, either fully or partially, to any educational agency or institution that allows corporal punishment.

Corporal punishment is defined in the bill as "paddling, spanking and other forms of physical punishment, however light, imposed upon a student." The bill provides for an exemption that allows for school personnel to use reasonable restraint if a student's behavior poses an imminent risk of physical injury to the student, school personnel, or others.

The bill affects educational agencies or public schools that receive federal funds and private schools that serve students who are recipients of federal services. The bill does not apply to home schools, or private schools that don't serve students who receive support from federal education programs. Currently, 19 states allow corporal punishment in their schools.

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The bill includes positive reinforcement too, by providing competitive grant funds to states to help them improve school climate and culture through the use of positive behavior support approaches. States may subgrant the funds to local educational agencies to help ensure that private schools can also participate.

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, a long-time opponent of the practice whose organization will support Rep. McCarthy's bill, said: "Just like we have fought against education policies being premised on sanctions and penalties, the same thing is true of the idea that threatening or administering physical punishment will motivate students. Corporal punishment—hitting children—improves neither behavior nor student performance," said.

Deborah J. Vagins, Senior Legislative Counsel of the ACLU's Washington Legislative Office, said: "This important legislation would end the arcane practice of corporal punishment in schools. It is stunning to think children in some states receive greater protections against physical discipline in detention facilities than they do in classrooms. The Ending Corporal Punishment in Schools Act will help provide the safe, supportive academic environment all students deserve and need to achieve academic success."

Nadine Block, founder of the Ohio-based national organization Center for Effective Discipline, said: "Ohio's legislature banned school corporal punishment in 2009. It was a struggle to win hearts and minds during that fight but we were successful because a majority of the public opposed the practice and no evidence existed that showed corporal punishment was better than other discipline strategies for changing school behavior. A nationwide ban makes sense to protect all students in America and Congress should act swiftly to pass this common-sense measure."

The 19 states where corporal punishment in schools is currently legal are: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Wyoming.

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