



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Children's Advocacy Centers Coalition Expresses Deep Disappointment in Governor's Budget Cut Amidst Migrant Housing Crisis

Boston, MA, August 9, 2023— The Massachusetts Children's Alliance stands in profound disappointment following the recent announcement of the Governor's budget cut affecting Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). CACs play a vital role in ensuring safety, well-being, and justice for the most vulnerable members of our society – child victims of abuse.

CACs provide a haven for victimized children who have experienced trauma, abuse, exploitation, and violence, offering them the safety to share their experiences and receive the necessary support to heal and recover. The services provided by CACs are essential to ensuring that the voices of these young survivors are heard and that justice is served. This decision comes at an especially critical time as Massachusetts grapples with a state of emergency concerning the migrant housing crisis.

In the face of the ongoing migrant housing crisis, with families and children seeking refuge in our state, the decision to cut the budget for CACs is not only ill-timed but also deeply misguided. CACs offer a trauma-informed, child-focused response to allegations of child sexual abuse as well as exploitation and trafficking. The trauma experienced by these migrant children, who have often fled perilous situations in their home countries, requires urgent attention and compassionate care. Children from migrant populations are at greater risk of exploitation and abuse. By reducing the funding for CACs, the state is sending a message that the well-being and rights of these vulnerable children are not a priority.

As we navigate this unprecedented crisis, it is imperative that our government shows unwavering commitment to the values of compassion, empathy, and justice. Thank you to our legislature for their FY '24 funding recommendation which reflected the CACs' identified funding needs. In 2022, our CACs provided 13,176 services to children and at-risk youth, served 7,346 children, and reported 871 victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) aka child trafficking. Our CACs' ever-expanding work is more critical now than ever.

The Massachusetts Children's Alliance urges the legislature to override Governor Healey's budget cut considering the urgent need for robust support for Children's Advocacy Centers. Our children deserve better, and our state must rise to the occasion by standing firmly against any decision that compromises their safety and well-being.

We implore the Governor and her administration to recognize the critical role that Children's Advocacy Centers play in creating a just and safe society for all. Now, more than ever, it is our responsibility to protect the most vulnerable among us and ensure that no child is left behind.

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About us:

The Massachusetts Children's Alliance pioneers the most promising, leading-edge ways that help victims of child abuse. We do this by promoting interventions that work, delivering effective educational programming, galvanizing informed and committed legislative support, and mobilizing communities to have tough but necessary conversations about child abuse. We are honored to be the closed membership coalition of the 12 Children's Advocacy Centers in the Commonwealth.

Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) serve as a child-friendly setting where professionals from law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, mental health, and medical services can meet and conduct a coordinated response to child abuse. The collaboration of these agents serving child victims and their families through the CAC model ensures access to services, including those of the legal, medical, mental health, and criminal justice systems. This state-of-the-art model provides the best response for child victims by reducing the risk of further trauma. Child victims of sexual assault are at greater risk for anxiety, depression, suicide, and serious health problems. The early intervention CAC model affords children a critical connection to much needed services to begin to heal and recover. Moreover, the collaborative approach developed and nurtured in CACs is endorsed by the American Bar Association and is cost-effective in the short and long term.

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