



**Senate Aging and Youth Committee
Public Hearing on Children’s Advocacy Centers
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Thank you, Chair Ward, Chair Collett, and members of the Senate Aging & Youth Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony to you today on behalf of PCCD and the Children's Advocacy Center Advisory Committee (CACAC, or Committee), which is housed in our agency.

As you may know, PCCD is a state agency that is governed by a 48-member board. The board consists of Cabinet secretaries from state agencies, members of the General Assembly, judges, district attorneys, victim advocates, county probation and parole administrators, juvenile justice administrators, and many others within the field of criminal justice. Since 1978, our mission has been three-fold: 1) to enhance the quality, coordination and planning within the criminal and juvenile justice systems; 2) to facilitate the delivery of services to victims of crime; and 3) to increase the safety of our communities.¹

The Children’s Advocacy Center Advisory Committee was established by Act 28 of 2014. This legislation was part of the comprehensive bill package adopted by the General Assembly from recommendations included in the [Task Force on Child Protection](#)’s Joint State Government Commission report released in November 2012 and in the wake of the Sandusky scandal at Penn State.

The Committee advises the Commission on matters related to children’s advocacy centers (CACs) and multidisciplinary investigative teams (MDITs). For those of you not familiar with child abuse investigations, every county’s district attorney is required by 23 Pa.C.S. §6365 (relating to services for prevention, investigation and treatment of child abuse) with convening a MDIT to coordinate child abuse investigations between county agencies, law enforcement, and a health care professional. MDITs are required to develop a protocol for convening their team, which should include standards and procedures to be used in receiving and referring reports, information sharing, and coordinating investigations of reported cases of child abuse. MDITs use CACs as a central hub to provide state-of-the-art treatment for the victims of child sexual abuse and child abuse. They coordinate medical care, treatment and other social services for victims while gathering evidence, through age-appropriate forensic interviewing and other methods

¹Our agency’s main functions are: 1) the administration of millions in federal and state dollars in grants to state and local criminal justice and juvenile justice agencies, victim service providers, school entities, nonprofit organizations, and children’s advocacy centers; 2) the training of sheriffs, deputy sheriffs, constables, and county adult probation and parole officers; and 3) administering victim’s compensation.

employed by MDITs, to build an effective case against the alleged offender. By bringing medical professionals, social workers, prosecutors and police who specialize in child sexual abuse together under one roof, CACs are viewed by many as the most effective way to bring a perpetrator to justice while simultaneously minimizing the negative impacts of a child abuse investigation on a child.

Chaired by former State Senator, Judge, and District Attorney David Heckler, the Committee is composed of 21 members who are experts in the field of child abuse, including district attorneys, children and youth services, CACs, law enforcement, victim services, medical doctors, sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) nurses, and mental health professionals. Each member has valuable experience in the multidisciplinary investigation of child abuse through the operation of a CAC. The Committee's mission is to promote prevention, treatment, and justice for victims of child sexual abuse and child abuse throughout the Commonwealth. It does this through the administration of grants using both Act 28 funding that is raised through a portion of the fee imposed on birth certificate copies in the state, and funding available through Act 1 of 2013, which is better known as the Endowment Act.

Since its inception, the CACAC has played a vital role in administering Endowment Act funding – i.e., \$48 million from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) assessed \$60 million penalty settlement against Penn State in January 2015. Per the requirements of Act 1, Endowment Act funds are directed towards programs and projects that prevent child sexual abuse, support the treatment of child sexual abuse victims, establish and enhance MDITs, and aid CACs within the Commonwealth. Over the years, the Committee has awarded approximately \$23 million in Endowment funds through 283 grants, which have made a significant impact in supporting over 75,000 child victims and adult survivors of child sexual abuse throughout our state. For more information about Endowment Act funding and the types of projects and programs it has been expended on, please visit our [Endowment Act Annual Reports](#) on our website.

I am proud to share that since the passage of Act 28 of 2014, the number of National Children's Alliance (NCA)-member² CACs throughout the Commonwealth has increased from 21 to 41 CACs. The Committee's goal is to provide every child within the Commonwealth access to CAC services within a reasonable distance. We are pleased to note that 99% of the state's population is now within an hour's drive of an NCA-member CAC. Ultimately, we would like to see that drive-time figure be much lower as we proliferate CAC services throughout the state.

PCCD has several important partners in our work. The Children's Advocacy Centers of Pennsylvania (PennCAC) provides crucial training and technical assistance to all CACs and assists all counties in the state in developing and strengthening their MDITs. The Children's Justice Act Task Force under the PA Department of Human Services (DHS) utilizes PCCD as a conduit to administer Children's Justice Act (CJA) funding to various projects around the state. PCCD has also partnered with the Child Maltreatment Solutions Network (CMSN) at Penn State to develop and collaborate on two large-scale, research-based prevention programs designed to

² NCA is the national association and accrediting body for a network of 939 Children's Advocacy Centers across the country. NCA provides support, advocacy, quality assurance, and national leadership for CACs.

combat child sexual abuse in Pennsylvania. These prevention programs target different populations, including adults, students, and parents, fostering a multi-pronged, community-wide effort in prevention. More information about these prevention pilot projects and published research on outcomes can also be found on our [Child Sexual Abuse Prevention](#) webpage.

I want to extend my gratitude to this Committee for your continuous support in our mission to protect children and ensure justice for victims of child sexual abuse and child abuse. PCCD and the CACAC remain committed to making further progress in this critical endeavor.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.