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National Child Protection

TRAINING CENTER

NCPTC is a training program of NAPSAC

June 10, 2008

The Honorable Henry Waxman
United States House of Representatives
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Waxman:

I have been a child protection professional for over twenty years. I served as a prosecutor in rural Minnesota from 1988-1997 and then accepted employment as a senior attorney for the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse (NCPCA), a program of the National District Attorneys Association.¹

In 1999, I was appointed as Director of NCPCA. In 2004, NDAA appointed me as "Director of Child Abuse Programs." In that capacity, I continued to oversee the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse as well as a new program, the National Child Protection Training Center.

The National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC) began operation in 2003. At that time, NCPTC was a program of the National District Attorneys Association and Winona State University (WSU).² In addition to providing training, technical assistance and publications to child protection professionals, NCPTC has a unique responsibility—to reform the undergraduate and graduate training of future child protection professionals.

¹ At the time I was hired, the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse was a program of the American Prosecutors Research Institute (APRI), the non-profit affiliate of the National District Attorneys Association. However, APRI subsequently merged into the NDAA.

² See, Victor I. Vieth, *The National Child Protection Training Center: A Partnership between APRI and Winona State University*, 38 (1) THE PROSECUTOR 33 (January/February 2004)

Numerous studies document that undergraduate and graduate programs inadequately prepare social workers, law enforcement officers, psychologists, nurses, doctors, prosecutors, judges and other child protection professionals to respond to cases of child maltreatment.³

To address this situation, NCPTC assisted Winona State University in designing an interdisciplinary undergraduate minor entitled Child Advocacy Studies (CAST). The CAST curriculum has been certified as a minor by the Minnesota State College and Universities System (MnSCU).

In developing CAST, WSU professors conducted an extensive, evidence-based analysis of peer reviewed child protection literature published within the past five years. In total, 563 articles were sorted and summarized by concept, critiqued by experts in the field, and then used to create the core courses. In addition, 56 federally funded child protection training programs were reviewed for content in an effort to determine the skills and knowledge demanded by the field. Once developed, the course outlines were reviewed by focus groups of front line medical and mental health professionals as well as social workers, law enforcement officers, and prosecutors.

In developing CAST, WSU and NCPTC relied on federal funds earmarked by Congress and monitored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Accordingly, OJJDP was aware of the unique curriculum unfolding on the campus of Winona State University. Moreover, our periodic reports to OJJDP, and our annual application for funds earmarked by Congress⁴, made it clear that NCPTC was in the process of implementing plans to disseminate the curriculum to interested universities throughout the United States.

For the fiscal year 2007, however, Congress did not complete its budgeting process and instead passed a continuing resolution which allowed OJJDP, and other agencies, to award large sums of money. Without an earmark, NCPTC was in danger of being unable to continue the improvement of CAST, much less disseminate the curriculum throughout the United States.

³ For a summary of these studies, and an overview of this issue, see *Unto the Third Generation: A Call to End Child Abuse in the United States Within 120 Years (Revised and Expanded)*, 28 *HAMLIN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC LAW & POLICY* 1, 13-16 & 31-41 (Fall 2006). In a 2006 study, Winona State University analyzed the web sites of 1,416 university and colleges. These universities offered baccalaureate degrees in criminal justice/law enforcement (393), social work (340), human services (113), nursing (390), medicine (96), psychology (794), sociology (639), and education (105). WSU professors searched these sites using the terms “child maltreatment”, “child abuse and neglect”, “child protection”, “child welfare”, and “child advocacy.” Only 29% (410) of these web sites had *any* course work addressing issues of child maltreatment. Moreover, when course work was offered, it was typically in fields of sociology or psychology—thus leaving the vast majority of child protection professionals with no training at the undergraduate level. Even when universities had some undergraduate coursework on child maltreatment, the coverage was often cursory. Indeed, not one of the 1,416 universities analyzed had a concentration, much less a minor on child maltreatment. This research was conducted by WSU Professor Jacqueline Hatlevig. For additional information on the study, contact Professor Hatlevig at: jhatlevig@winona.edu

⁴ NCPTC has received the following earmarks: FY 03 \$993,500; FY 04 \$541,000; FY 05 \$200,000; FY 06 \$300,000; FY 08 \$1.222 million dollars (combined total from two earmarks).

In the hope of disseminating the CAST reform throughout the country, WSU applied for a competitive grant posted by OJJDP. Specifically, WSU applied for three million dollars spread over five years. WSU applied for this money in response to an OJJDP RFP for FY 2007 National Juvenile Justice Programs. WSU applied under category two, "reducing child victimization."

Under the proposal, WSU detailed the need for CAST, the success of the program, and then set forth an orderly process for implementing this undergraduate curriculum in 100 universities within five years. In year one of the proposal, a working group including professors from seven universities would assist NCPTC in developing national standards for CAST and in developing an application process for implementing the curriculum in interested universities. A copy of the proposal is included with this letter.

In year two, this governing body would review applications from interested universities and would select 25 universities to implement the curriculum. A total of 50 professors, two from each institution, would be flown to WSU and participate in a five day course on CAST. Upon completion of the course, these professors would continue to receive intensive, ongoing assistance until CAST was implemented at their universities and met the national standards for the curriculum. This process would be repeated in years 3-5 until the curriculum was fully implemented, or at least in the process of being implemented in 100 universities throughout the United States.

If successful, this proposal will have a profound impact on our child protection system by significantly reducing, if not eliminating "on-the-job-training" as the primary means of educating front line child protection professionals. It is easy to see how the proposal could, in a relatively short period of time, impact positively thousands of child protection professionals and tens of thousands of children.

This, indeed, is what OJJDP was seeking. On page one of its RFP, OJJDP stated it was intending to "provide support to programs that have a national scope and national impact on...reducing the victimization of children..." On page 5 of the RFP, OJJDP reiterated that, under category two (reducing child victimization), it was again looking "to support national scope programs that reduce child victimization" and that "child abuse and neglect" was a "key priority."

On pages 5-6 of the RFP, OJJDP further stated the "purpose of this program is to foster innovations and advancements" in "child protection related practice" through one of two methodologies:

1. "Innovative approaches that have yet to be tested through experimental research, but merit consideration because their relevance to public policy, practice or theory may facilitate their practical application nationwide..."
2. "Advancement in the applicant's present program practices intended to address a new or continuing...child protection problem..."

Also on page 6 of the RFP, OJJDP stated the “goal of this program is to advance... child protection... by expanding the knowledge base... of child protection... and demonstrating practical implications for juvenile and child protection policy and practice.”

Given OJJDP’s emphasis on a child protection initiative that was national in scope, that was suitable for “practical application nationwide”, and that addressed a “new or continuing” child protection problem, a proposal to implement a model undergraduate child protection minor in 100 universities, thereby dramatically improving the competencies of thousands of future child protection professionals should be highly rated.

WSU submitted our proposal prior to the application deadline of June 8, 2007 (see page 3 of RFP). On November 6, 2007, WSU received an e-mail that the CAST proposal was not awarded. On November 7, 2007, WSU sent an e-mail from its Director of Grants and Sponsored Projects, Nancy K. Peterson, requesting our peer reviewed comments. On April 14, 2008, five months after our initial request for the comments, OJJDP e-mailed WSU the peer review comments. *All* of the comments were favorable. The comments included:

- “Project offers both innovative approach and advancement of current practice.”
- “Clear description of need for the project.”
- “Applicant clearly has the organizational capacity and experience to manage the project.”
- “Key personnel have significant knowledge and experience in this field.”
- “Applicant is recognized for successful collaborative efforts in this area.”

I have also included with this letter the comments in their entirety.

OJJDP, however, did not inform WSU of its actual scores. This information was acquired in reading the *Youth Today* articles. According to these articles, the WSU proposal was ranked fourth and received a final score of 96.5. *Every* proposal that OJJDP funded was ranked below the WSU proposal (see Patrick Boyle, *For Juvenile Justice, A Panel of One*, 17(1) YOUTH TODAY 1, 6-9 (December/January 2008).

Although the OJJDP RFP advised us that “(p)eer reviewers’ ratings and any resulting recommendations are advisory only”, we were also informed that “OJJDP is committed to ensuring a competitive and standardized process for awarding grants” (page 13 of RFP). In the April 14 letter/e-mail from OJJDP containing our peer review comments, WSU was informed “the selection process was highly competitive” and that a “review panel reviewed applications *against the criteria set out in the solicitation.*” (April 14, 2008 letter/e-mail from Jeff Slowikowski, Associate Administrator, Demonstration Programs Division) (emphasis added).

The consequence of not getting this award was nearly disastrous for our program. Even prior to the announcement of OJJDP’s denial of this grant, the NDAA concluded it was financially

unable to continue NCPTC.⁵ All of us at the National Child Protection Training Center lost our jobs at the end of October, 2007. We survived only because the National Association to Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children (NAPSAC), a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization, and NAPSAC Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, both located in St. Paul, Minnesota, agreed to continue the program. Congress also acted by awarding WSU two congressional earmarks totaling 1.222 million dollars for FY 2008. Ironically, as a result of these earmarks, OJJDP will again serve as our grant monitor as we begin to implement the CAST curriculum across the United States.

I have the highest regard for OJJDP. In the more than 10 years I have worked in programs receiving OJJDP funding, I have consistently been impressed with the hard work and dedication of OJJDP staff. These dedicated public servants are committed to improving our nation's juvenile justice and child protection systems.

However, OJJDP's handling of the FY 2007 National Juvenile Justice Programs left the impression that funding is not based on merit but on internal factors developed after the fact. This impression is based in large part on what has been learned from the *Youth Today* articles. Although the handling of these grants by OJJDP did not terminate the pioneering work of the National Child Protection Training Center, we nearly lost a program which has the potential to dramatically improve the education of future child protection professionals and that will positively impact the lives of tens of thousands of children.

Hubert Humphrey once said "Each child is an adventure into a better life—an opportunity to change the old pattern and make it new." My hope for the Congressional hearings into the handling of these grants is for your committee to find out what went wrong in the assessment and awarding of these grants and how, for the sake of children, this process can be improved.

Best regards,



Victor I. Vieth
Director,
NAPSAC's National Child Protection Training Center

⁵ See Thomas J. Charron, *Hands Across the Border*, 41(6) THE PROSECUTOR 6, 42 (Nov/Dec. 2007). As explained by the NDAA Executive Director, "During the course of our pursuit for funding, one of NDAA's programs found an alternative means of financing its functions by creating a partnership. NDAA's National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC) located in Winona, Minnesota, has entered into a cooperative agreement with the National Association to Prevent Sexual Abuse of Children (NAPSAC). This agreement will allow NCPTC to continue its outstanding work despite limited federal funding. Unfortunately, NDAA must bid a fond farewell to the staff of NCPTC as NDAA employees. NDAA, however, plans to work closely with NAPSAC and NCPTC to continue to provide prosecutors with the most current and innovative research and training for prosecutors involved in cases of child abuse."