

February 28, 2019

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
709 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baldwin,

On behalf of the following organizations in Wisconsin that work to keep children safe and healthy, we write to express our strong support for the Early Detection to Stop Infant Abuse and Prevent Fatalities Act. This legislation is critical towards improving early recognition and intervention efforts to protect vulnerable infants and will help prevent many cases of abuse and related fatalities.

The bill would authorize the Department of Health and Human Services to fund research to test the effectiveness of initiatives to improve early detection and management of abusive injuries in infants under the age of seven months to prevent future cases of child abuse and related fatalities.

Multiple studies have found that relatively minor, visible injuries in young infants, including bruising and intraoral injuries, are not normal and are often indicators of abuse. These injuries are commonly overlooked by medical providers, caregivers and child welfare professionals because the injuries seem trivial. When this happens, physical abuse can escalate resulting in severe abusive injuries or even fatalities. Many child abuse professionals term these injuries to be 'sentinel injuries' in young infants because of their importance as early warning signs of abuse, or rarely, life-threatening medical disorders.

As you know, research conducted in Wisconsin showed that previous sentinel injuries were later identified in 27.5 percent of abused infants and 30 percent of infants who suffered abusive head trauma. Importantly, these injuries were rare in infants who had not been abused. Other studies have demonstrated similar rates of missed opportunities to identify abuse in young infants.

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families [recorded](#) 806 substantiated reports of physical child abuse in 2017, with approximately 35 percent occurring in children under the age of three. Of the reported child maltreatment fatalities in Wisconsin, 86 percent of the deaths were children age three or under and 43 percent of the deaths were children under age one. These findings are consistent with national data.

Your legislation will help support our efforts to improve recognition of the earliest signs of physical abuse before the abuse escalates by authorizing the development and dissemination of evidence-based best practices and protocols to improve the detection and management of these sentinel injuries in infants.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue to improve the safety and well-being of children.

American Academy of Pediatrics – Wisconsin Chapter  
American Family Children's Hospital  
Child Advocacy Centers of Wisconsin  
Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin  
Children's Hospital of Wisconsin  
Marshfield Clinic  
Medical College of Wisconsin  
UW Health