



**Prevent Child Abuse**  
America

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Dear Editor:

\$104 billion is not small change, especially in our current economic environment. It is the kind of money that should make every American take pause, every politician take a stand and everyone who cares about children rethink the way we, as a country, think about child abuse and neglect. A study released in January by Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA America) and the Pew Charitable Trusts calculated the economic impact of our failure to prevent child abuse and neglect at \$103.8 billion for 2007 alone. It begs the question “why aren’t we focused on preventing abuse, rather than responding after it has occurred?” Isn’t that the right thing to do for our children, our country and our economy?

The costs associated with the pervasive and long-lasting effects of child abuse and neglect are as undeniable as our obligation to prevent – not just respond to – this problem. In 2007, \$33 billion in direct costs for foster care services, hospitalization, mental health treatment, and law enforcement were supplemented by over \$70 billion in indirect costs like loss of individual productivity, chronic health problems, special education, and delinquent and criminal justice services. It’s time we re-think our public policies on prevention and child well being both because it makes good common sense and because it makes ‘cents’ for our country and economy.

But what does “prevention” really mean? It means stopping child abuse and neglect before it ever occurs. While critical to our country’s children, we must do more than *respond* to abuse and neglect through prosecution and intervention. We must initiate and support services and policies that focus on early child development, and allow communities to create conditions best suited to them that allow parents to be the kinds of parents they want to be. Programs such as voluntary home visiting, parent education, mental health services and substance abuse treatment must be in place for all families regardless of wealth, to provide safe and healthy environments in which children can grow.

Prevention priorities have historically lagged behind abuse response measures but the ‘winds of change’ clearly have begun to blow. As our nation recognizes April as Child Abuse Prevention Month please take note of the nearly half a million pinwheels that have been distributed across the country as part of PCA America’s national Pinwheels for Prevention campaign. The pinwheels represent the changes that are occurring in the belief that we know child abuse and neglect can be prevented.

Through its chapters in 43 states and Healthy Families America sites in over 400 communities, PCA America works to provide healthy, safe and nurturing experiences for more than 100,000 families every year. Let’s ask ourselves the same question every time we see a pinwheel for prevention....what do we need to do differently to stop more children from ever being abused or neglected? We know the answer; the research is clear. Now it’s time to do something about it. Be part of the solution and help us create healthier and stronger communities. For more answers, please visit [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org) and [www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org).

Signed,

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