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PRESS RELEASE

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Comprehensive Addiction & Recovery Act Spotlights Infants Impacted by Opioid Epidemic *Pennsylvania Congressional delegation led effort to improve and enforce Infant Plans of Safe Care*

July 13th – Today Pennsylvania’s Center for Children’s Justice (C4CJ) joined with retired Pennsylvania Congressman James Greenwood and other diverse stakeholders to praise passage of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA).

CARA (S. 524) received overwhelming bipartisan support Wednesday in the United States Senate and last week the U.S. House of Representatives approved CARA 407 to 5. CARA now awaits action by President Barack Obama.

Congress included The Infant Plan of Safe Care Improvement Act (S.2687/H.R. 4843) within CARA. S. 2687 was sponsored by United States Senator Bob Casey, Jr. and H.R. 4843 was sponsored by Pennsylvania Congressman Lou Barletta.

Between 2010 and 2014, more than 7,500 infants were born onto Medicaid and diagnosed with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) in Pennsylvania.

*“Babies and very young children daily are paying a price as a result of the relentless and far-reaching heroin and prescription opioid epidemic tearing apart families and communities across the Commonwealth,” said **Cathleen Palm, Founder of C4CJ**. “Babies suffering through withdrawal from drugs, fatalities and near-fatalities linked to parental substance use, and spikes in the number of young children placed in foster care are harsh and routine, yet seldom reported, realities of this epidemic.”*

In December 2015, Reuters published Helpless and Hooked: the most vulnerable victims of the opioid epidemic. This Reuters Investigation raised awareness that every 19 minutes an infant is born in the United States suffering through withdrawal from opioids. Reuters’ investigation highlighted the tragic death of 6-week-old Brayden Cummings who died in Carbon County, Pennsylvania.

“Brayden’s death revealed a national disgrace and glaring failure at the federal, state and local level to implement Plans of Safe Care for infants required by federal law since 2003,” said **retired Pennsylvania Congressman James Greenwood**, who authored the 2003 federal law. *“I applaud the leadership of the Pennsylvania Congressional delegation, particularly U.S. Senator Bob Casey, Jr. and Congressman Lou Barletta, for resolving to honor Brayden and to act on behalf of other drug-dependent infants to improve the health and safety of these babies and their families.”*

In March, diverse stakeholders called on Governor Tom Wolf and leaders of Pennsylvania’s General Assembly to create an intentional and time-limited task force to:

1. Prioritize prevention of substance-exposed infants,
2. Improve outcomes for pregnant and parenting women striving to recover from addiction; and
3. Promote the health, safety and permanency of substance-exposed infants and other young children at-risk of child abuse and neglect or placement in foster care due to parental alcohol and drug use.

In 2014, more than 1,400 infants in Pennsylvania were removed from home and 817 (more than 56 percent of those removed) had parental substance abuse as a contributing factor to placement.

“With the bipartisan passage of CARA, Congress has provided added incentive for Pennsylvania to act on an intentional and inter-disciplinary agenda to improve the health, safety and permanency of infants affected by prenatal drug exposure,” said **Denise Salerno, MD, FAAP, President of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics**. *“Reliable and timely data, standardized interdisciplinary Plans of Safe Care that address the needs of the baby and his/her family, and sustained leadership are needed now.”*

In addition to including the Infant Plan of Safe Care legislation, C4CJ identified other elements of CARA (S. 524) important to young children and their families:

- Substance abuse treatment programs are to make available “therapeutic, comprehensive child care for children” when the child’s mother is receiving health and rehabilitative services.
- Creates a competitive pilot grant program to be administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to meet the unique needs of pregnant and postpartum women intended, in part, to support family based services within residential and non-residential settings.
- Within the Department of Justice, creates a Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Grant Program to develop or expand treatment alternatives over incarceration, including strategies focused “on parents whose incarceration could result in their children entering the child welfare system.”
- The Government Accountability Office (GAO) will study the prevalence of NAS and identify best practices for treating infants diagnosed with NAS.

More information about the impact of the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic on children in Pennsylvania, can be found at <http://www.c4cj.org/Children and the Opioid Epidemic.php>.

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