February 11, 2016

The Honorable Robert Casey, Jr. 
United States Senate 
393 Russell Senate Office Building 
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pat Toomey 
United States Senate 
248 Russell Senate Office Building 
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Casey and Toomey:

Daily the undersigned are engaged in diverse work to ensure every child is connected to a safe, stable and supported family. Despite the diversity of our work, we are united in our deep understanding that the foundation for lifelong health, well-being, educational success, and economic opportunity is established within the critical years of early childhood, especially from birth to age three.

We write to express how encouraged we are that you serve on the United States Senate Committee on Finance. Your commitment to the nurture, protection and early learning of Pennsylvania’s youngest children will be instrumental when the Senate Finance Committee considers the Family First Act in 2016. This legislation and its commitment to upfront, time-limited, evidence-based services for children who safely remain at home with their family arrives as Pennsylvania confronts an alarming and relentless heroin and opioid epidemic.

Between 2010 and 2014, more than 7,500 infants were born onto Medicaid and diagnosed with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) in Pennsylvania. Heroin and other opioids taken during pregnancy, including drugs prescribed to a pregnant woman as part of her participation in substance abuse treatment (e.g., Methadone Buprenorphine), can result in NAS.

The proposed Family First legislation is precedent-setting as it seeks to amend federal law to include a subtitle related to Investing in Prevention and Family Services. If enacted states could be proactive, strategic and more reliant on evidence-based interventions with families increasing the likelihood that a child can safely remain with his/her family. The proposed Family First Act is particularly promising for substance-exposed infants. We also find this emerging commitment to direct federal funding to upfront and evidence-based interventions consistent with Congress’ 2003 amendment of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requiring the development of a Plan of Safe Care for certain substance-exposed infants.

We are encouraged that the Family First legislation could help facilitate federal agencies and states to connect policy provisions – across federal and state statutes - and to maximize a variety of public funding streams to implement Plans of safe Care that improve outcomes for infants and parents confronting the chronic health condition of addiction.

Again, we remain encouraged by the initial bipartisan work surrounding the Family First Act and we look forward to your leadership to help your colleagues recognize the importance of this federal legislation to young children and families directly impacted by the heroin and opioid epidemic.
Please be assured of our commitment to work with you and the full Pennsylvania Congressional delegation throughout 2016 as the Family First Act evolves in Congress.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics, PA Chapter
Suzanne Yunghans, Executive Director

CASA Youth Advocates, Inc.
Anne Shenberger MSS LSW, Executive Director

Central Susquehanna Community Foundation
M. Holly Morrison, CEO

Children’s Advocacy Center of Lawrence County
Sue Ascione, Executive Director

Crawford County CASA
Cindy Knight, Executive Director

Crime Victim Center of Erie
Paul Lukach, Executive Director

Family Service Assn. of Bucks County
Audrey J. Tucker, CEO

HAVIN (Helping All Victims in Need)
Jo Ellen Bowman, Executive Director

Huntingdon House
Jean R Collins, Executive Director

Maternity Care Coalition
Joanne Fischer, Executive Director

Network of Victim Assistance
Barbara Clark, Executive Director

INDIVIDUALS
Ken Bacha, Westmoreland County Coroner
Marsha Barth (Berks County)
Jerry C. Borden, Warren County Coroner
Larry Breitenstein (Allegheny County)
Pat Bruno, M.D., FAAP (Snyder County)
Jocelyn Clyde (Armstrong County)
Juliann Gombosi (Lycoming County)
Scott M. Grim, Lehigh County Coroner
Dennis J. Hess, Berks County Coroner
Edward R. Howell, Wayne County Coroner
Charles E. Kiessling, Lycoming County Coroner
Ruth Kolb (Allegheny County)
Benjamin H. Levi, MD PhD (Dauphin County)

Nurse-Family Partnership National Service Office
Tara Dechert, Business Development Manager

Office of Victim Advocate
Jennifer Storm, Victim Advocate

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape
Delilah Rumburg, CEO

Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Rev. Sandra L. Strauss, Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach

Pennsylvania State Coroners Association
Susan M. Shanaman, Counsel

Philadelphia Children’s Alliance
Chris Kirchner, Executive Director

Prevent Child Abuse PA
Teresa Olsen, Director

Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association
Connell O'Brien, Director Children’s Division

The Center for Children’s Justice
Mary Achilles, Board Chair
Cathleen Palm, Founder

York County Cribs for Kids
Michael Goodstein, MD
Audrey Miller (Armstrong County)
Eugene Quaglia (Berks County)
Renee Riddle, MD (Berks County)
Gregory P Rohanna, Greene County Coroner
Patricia M. Ross, Blair County Coroner
Scott A. Sayers, Centre County Coroner
Jenny Murphy-Shiflet (Dauphin County)
Elizabeth A. Schmoyer, RN, BSN, Med (Berks County)
Gary I. Shuey (Cumberland County)
Karen Snider (Dauphin County)
Meghan Winslow (Lebanon County)
Patricia Yoder, MSN, RN (Lancaster County)