

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STEPS THAT WOULD REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN NEW MEXICO

Recommendations for the Interim Legislative Health and Human Services Committee prepared by an *ad hoc* working group convened jointly by State Senator Gerald Ortiz y Pino and Racheal Gonzales, survivor of childhood abuse; summer and fall of 2013.

A full listing of working group participants is at end of recommendations. (November 6, 2013)

1. Increase the availability of home visitation programs for young families, through any and all sources possible, including Medicaid.
2. Unsubstantiated Child Abuse and Neglect referrals should become a portal to voluntary participation in services; we need a way to emphasize the wisdom of offering this group of at risk families some supports and assistance.
3. Inter-agency collaboration has to be improved if we are to truly begin making headway against child abuse and neglect in this state. Ending the “silo” effect under which each department goes its own way would help immensely. The Children’s Cabinet should become the means for fostering this united front approach.
4. We support the use of the public health model rather than the criminal deterrence model in dealing with child abuse prevention.
5. For prevention efforts to be effective it is necessary to improve drastically the availability and usability of data on relevant measures so our assessment of outcomes can be more accurate.
6. We favor the creation of county early childhood committees as components of County Health Planning Councils everywhere in the state. This will further the interagency coordination at the service delivery level and improve the sharing of relevant data.
7. We support the creation of a directory of successful, evidence-based approaches to prevention which are tailored to the realities of New Mexico, for use in expanding and replicating services.
8. New Mexico needs stronger and better-funded family planning, marriage and parenting preparation programs, including—but not limited to—classes in school. TANF funds should be explored as a resource for this as was done previously.
9. Effective drug and alcohol treatment in the state, if made widely available, would be a strong tool in reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect, especially programs for pregnant, addicted women.
10. The “probation subsidy” model, in which reductions in the number of young people sent to juvenile corrections would generate a shifting of funds from the institutions back to the local community for financing prevention and diversion efforts, ought to be utilized to help with adjusting state budgets to focus more on preventing problems like child abuse.

11. Efforts at reducing poverty have to be emphasized if we are to hope to ever get a handle on the extent of the child abuse and neglect problem in our state.

12. Early childhood education programs, if made universal, and if strengthened through added training for the staffs at the programs, can play a major role in reducing child abuse and neglect.

13. The Governor's Office could take the lead in making the prevention of child abuse and neglect a high profile concern by calling an annual (or possibly biennial) Statewide Summit on this topic, bringing together the foremost practitioners and researchers in the field, together with policy makers, elected officials and leaders in education, health, family well-being and business to share information and best practices. These summits could also serve to generate policy initiatives and legislation designed to reduce the incidence of child abuse. They could be opportunities to unveil and in subsequent years to monitor progress in, the State's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan.

14. We strongly recommend creating and supporting initiatives aimed at fostering children's awareness of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, such as Erin's Law.

Volunteers who worked on preparing these recommendations:

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