



Dear Co-Chairs Rep. Rena Moran and Sen. Julie Rosen

I'm writing in support of recommendations from the 2015 Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children that have not yet been implemented. They include conducting fact-finding before assigning a case to Family Assessment, interviewing children separately from adults, and avoid giving parents advance warning of a child protection visit.

I've been in the field of child protection for 30 years. I served as a rural prosecutor here in Minnesota for a decade and went on to direct the National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse and founded the National Child Protection Training Center (now part of the Zero Abuse Project). I've trained over 50,000 child protection professionals from all 50 states and many countries, consulted on thousands of cases and worked with many of the nation's foremost experts in the field of child protection. From this experience, it is clear the key reforms referenced here that were recommended by the Governor's Task Force reflect best practice.

Somewhere between 60-80% of abused children delay disclosing abuse until adults, with boys delaying even longer than girls. A primary reason for this is that most children are abused by a parent who they love and/or fear. A child may have been threatened not to tell or a child may fear the consequences of a disclosure such as a loved one going to jail. Given these and other dynamics, it is very difficult for a child abuse victim to speak about abuse and virtually impossible to do so in front of an offender. If a parent is an offender, tipping him or her off of a pending visit increases the chance a child will be pressured not to tell a social worker what happened. If a child has visible bruises or cuts, an offender will have time to hide them. If there is evidence of neglect or abuse in the house, there will be time to tidy up a potential crime scene.

Although cases screened into Family Assessment are designed to be lower risk, we know from Poly-victimization research that two-thirds of maltreated children are abused in at least two categories and one-third are abused in five or more categories. Accordingly, what appears to be a case of mild neglect may involve other, more egregious forms of maltreatment. Without fact-finding, the risk of egregious error increases.

I hope this information is helpful. If I can assist in any additional way, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. Vieth".

Victor I. Vieth
Director, Education & Research
Zero Abuse Project