



**PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Anne Roberts, Executive Director

Office: 405 / 236-5437, ext. 110

Cell: 405 / 627-9877

## **Child Advocates Propose Ways to Reduce Child Abuse**

(Oklahoma City) The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy today released a new proposal to the Oklahoma State Legislature to help reduce child abuse in Oklahoma. The proposal calls for the more funds to be invested in the lives of young families, and mirrors the 2006 Legislative Agenda for Children and Youth supported by hundreds of advocates across the state.

“Oklahoma has been heart-broken over the recent death of a precious toddler at the hands of people who should have protected her,” states Anne Roberts, Executive Director. “Everybody wants to figure out what went wrong and fix it. But the current efforts are focused on the system that deals with children after the abuse or neglect occurs. A much more compassionate and effective approach would be to focus on the system where the abuse begins – the family.”

Roberts says that the purpose of the proposal is to refute the myths about child abuse, so that lawmakers can “diagnose” the problem, and direct resources where they will do the most good. According to the annual report published by the Department of Human Services, 82% of all the confirmed cases of maltreatment in Oklahoma are due to neglect – not abuse. Only 5% of cases are sexual abuse, and 13% are physical abuse. The most common form of neglect is substance abuse. Over half the perpetrators are mothers; one-quarter are fathers. Most of the rest are relatives. Even in sexual abuse cases, the vast majority of the abusers are people the child knows.

“Based on these facts, our current focus on strangers and sex offenders may be off base,” says Roberts, “leading us to divert attention and resources that could be better spent where most of the abuse really occurs – in the family.”

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The proposal calls for investing in programs and services that strengthen young families, including teen pregnancy prevention, prenatal care and parenting education. But because the most common form of neglect stems from substance abuse, the report also calls for a new investment in substance abuse treatment programs.

“The consequences of abuse and neglect of children are well documented. At the very least, abuse robs children of their innocence; at worst, it breeds rage and sorrow that will erupt in adulthood. This proposal provides a means to turn the tide on the rising rates of abuse and neglect in Oklahoma, and to recognize and build on the strengths of Oklahoma’s families.”

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The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy is an independent, statewide organization that raises awareness, takes action, and changes policy on behalf of the children and youth of Oklahoma. For more information, contact Anne Roberts, 405 / 236-5437, or [www.oica.org](http://www.oica.org).