**A** **HOUSE RESOLUTION**

TO AFFIRM THE COMMITMENT OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TOWARD PROTECTING THE CHILDREN OF SOUTH CAROLINA FROM THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HARMS THAT OCCURRED AS A RESULT OF THE COVID‑19 PANDEMIC.

Whereas, child protective service agencies across the United States received 4.3 million reports alleging abuse and neglect of 7.8 million children in 2018 alone. Of those children, nearly 678,000 were determined to be confirmed victims; and

Whereas, sixty‑seven percent of substantiated child abuse or neglect reports come from victim‑serving professionals such as teachers, administrators, school counselors, and other educational professors. Family members collectively represent only twelve percent of hotline calls; and

Whereas, though necessary to slow the spread of COVID‑19, actions such as social distancing, sheltering in place, restricting travel, and the closure of key community foundations are likely to dramatically increase the risk for family violence around the globe; and

Whereas, social distancing coupled with increased economic stress in vulnerable households increases risk for domestic violence, child abuse, and neglect. Controlling behaviors used as a means of coping with trauma, unemployment, and limited access to social support systems have all been identified as family violence risk factors that also commonly occur after natural disasters; and

Whereas, children reside in sixty percent or more of households where domestic violence is perpetrated and are also at risk of suffering significant physical and emotional harm; and

Whereas, child protection agencies are experiencing strained resources with fewer workers available, making them unable to conduct home visits in areas with stay‑at‑home orders; and

Whereas, according to the National Children’s Alliance in regards to child abuse reporting, national children’s advocacy centers, which provide support for families and children as abuse cases move through the justice system, reported serving 40,000 fewer children nationwide, which represents a twenty‑one percent drop; and

Whereas, many child welfare organizations are noting a significant drop in reports of child abuse or neglect, which may be a result of fewer opportunities for detection as opposed to an actual decrease in incidence; and

Whereas, since the pandemic began, there have been isolated reports of increased child abuse severity, however numerous states are reporting an ominous decrease in reports to child protective services thought to be related to underrecognition; and

Whereas, children are a vulnerable group in this global public health emergency, as their nervous systems, endocrine systems, and hypothalamic‑pituitary‑adrenal axes are not well developed; and

Whereas, psychological crises often cause children to produce feelings of abandonment, despair, incapacity, exhaustion, and even raise the risk of suicide; and

Whereas, COVID‑19‑associated mental health risks will disproportionately hit children and adolescents who are already disadvantaged and marginalized, especially since isolation, contact restrictions and economic shutdowns impose a complete change to the psychosocial environment of affected countries; and

Whereas, to improve health care access for children, action is needed to address the physical and mental health effects of the COVID‑19 crisis among children and offset the potential for widening health disparities among those in poverty; and

Whereas, when COVID‑19‑related measures are lifted and society returns to “normal,” child abuse victim‑serving professionals may find themselves completely buried in reports and unable to meet the needs of an overwhelming number of victims; and

Whereas, acutely aware of the responsibility the State of South Carolina has to protect its most vulnerable citizens, the South Carolina House of Representatives shall dedicate its efforts to providing the necessary resources and finding innovative ways to reach those who are in need of safety in these trying times. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives:

That the members of the South Carolina House of Representatives, by this resolution, affirm the commitment of the South Carolina House of Representatives toward protecting children from the mental and physical harms that occurred as a result of the COVID‑19 pandemic.

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