

GAO

Testimony

For Release  
On Delivery  
Expected at  
10:00 a.m. EDT  
Thursday  
May 9, 1991

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHILD ABUSE  
PREVENTION AND TREATMENT ACT OF 1988  
BY THE NATIONAL CENTER ON CHILD ABUSE  
AND NEGLECT**

Statement of  
Joseph F. Delfico, Director of  
Income Security Issues  
Human Resources Division

Before the  
Subcommittee on Select Education  
Committee on Education and Labor  
House of Representatives



## SUMMARY

The Chairman, Subcommittee on Select Education, House Committee on Education and Labor, asked GAO to look into how the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN) has implemented Public Law 100-294, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1988 (CAPTA). Established in 1974, NCCAN has primary responsibility in leading federal efforts to combat child abuse and neglect.

We assessed NCCAN's actions to implement and manage the requirements of CAPTA dealing with the administration of grants for demonstration or service programs and projects; establishment of a national clearinghouse for information relating to child abuse and neglect; conduct of research projects and the provision of technical assistance and training relating to various aspects of child abuse and neglect; development of a national data collection system on child abuse; publication of various reports for submission to the Congress; establishment of the Inter-agency Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect; and recruitment of experienced, professional staff.

Even though NCCAN has addressed the requirements of CAPTA to varying degrees, staff and budget shortages have kept it from fully carrying out its mission and the requirements mandated by CAPTA. Therefore, NCCAN's ability to perform its intended role as a leader in identifying, preventing, and treating child abuse and neglect, is subject to question if staffing and resource shortages continue. Furthermore, we are not certain that a full complement of NCCAN staff would enable it to handle the workload generated in administering about 300 complex and diverse grants annually. We have long been concerned about HHS' ability to adequately manage its grant administration workload and are concerned that NCCAN may repeat past failures noted in our reports that span the last decade.

Detailed plans for the organization of the recently established Administration for Children and Families have not been completed. As a result, the impact of the reorganization on NCCAN and its programs is not known. If NCCAN issues and programs are not given priority attention by the new operating division, however, the Congress may wish to consider either lowering its expectations for NCCAN or achieving the goals of CAPTA by other means.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee;

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the implementation of Public Law 100-294, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1988 (CAPTA).

In March 1991, you requested that GAO look into how the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN) has implemented CAPTA. Specifically, I will comment on NCCAN's actions to implement and administer the requirements of CAPTA dealing with the:

- Administration of grants for demonstration or service programs and projects;
- Establishment of a national clearinghouse for information relating to child abuse and neglect;
- Conduct of research projects and the provision of technical assistance and training relating to various aspects of child abuse and neglect;
- Development of a national data collection system on child abuse;

- Publication of various reports for submission to the Congress;
- Establishment of the Inter-agency Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect; and
- Recruitment of experienced, professional staff.

I will also discuss some aspects of how NCCAN is administering other programs and activities under CAPTA.

In general we found that NCCAN had implemented the requirements of the Act. In many cases, however, NCCAN did not fully satisfy the law's requirements because of not meeting required timeframes and/or deadlines, or not completing actions specified in the law. These shortcomings occurred to some extent because NCCAN has not been allotted the staffing levels and budget amounts needed. However, even if NCCAN is given its full allotment of staff, we are not sure that it will be able to accomplish the workload generated in administering about 300 grants annually.

#### BACKGROUND

Established in 1974, NCCAN has primary responsibility for managing and leading the federal effort to combat child abuse and

neglect. NCCAN's mission includes: (1) developing policies and plans on programs relating to the prevention, identification, and treatment of child abuse and neglect, (2) developing and implementing, through grants and contracts, approved research and demonstration projects and plans related to child abuse and neglect, (3) compiling, analyzing, and disseminating publications and other materials on child abuse and neglect, (4) assisting government agencies, public and private service organizations, and the general public on child abuse and neglect issues, and (5) developing, maintaining, and updating the information clearinghouse on child abuse and neglect issues.

Until a major reorganization on April 15, 1991, NCCAN was a part of the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF), in the Office of Human Development Services (OHDS). NCCAN and ACYF are now part of HHS' newly formed Administration for Children and Families. This organization consolidated the programs and resources of the Family Support Administration, OHDS (except for the Administration on Aging), and the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, previously administered by the Public Health Service.

#### GRANT ADMINISTRATION

In fiscal year 1990, NCCAN's active grants included 106 basic state grants, 46 challenge grants, and 93 discretionary grants,

totaling about \$30 million. NCCAN also awarded about \$9.2 million in grants to 37 states, the District of Columbia, and 5 possessions and territories under the Children's Justice Act (P.L. 99-401). NCCAN has awarded grants according to announced priorities and addressed the research and demonstration subject areas required in CAPTA. Shortages in staff and resources, however, have hindered NCCAN's grant administration activities.

During the 1980s we issued several reports criticizing the way in which HHS' components managed child welfare grant programs.<sup>1</sup> OHDS and its components were also cited in HHS' December 1989 Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act (FIA) Report to the President and Congress for not adhering to established policies and procedures in regard to conducting on-site monitoring visits of discretionary grantees' and not following-up on evaluations of progress and grantees' quarterly financial reports. This situation remains largely unchanged today.

Agency officials told us that for several years inadequate staff and resources have kept NCCAN from complying with federal regulations and HHS policies in regard to its grant management

---

<sup>1</sup>Children's Issues: A Decade of GAO Reports and Recent Activities, (GAO/HRD-90-162, Sept. 21, 1990); Health and Human Services: Documentation of Funding Decisions for Child Abuse and Neglect Grants Inadequate, (GAO/HRD-87-69, May 22, 1987); Child and Family Welfare: Selected HHS Discretionary Grant Funding in Fiscal Year 1985, (GAO/HRD-86-87FS, April 10, 1986); and Increased Federal Efforts Needed to Better Identify, Treat, and Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect, (GAO/HRD-80-66, April 29, 1980).

responsibilities. NCCAN has taken some steps to remedy this situation, but staff and travel resources are still a problem. For example, NCCAN's fiscal year 1991 travel budget for monitoring activities totaled only about \$7,000. As a result, few on-site monitoring visits to grantee locations are made.

As a substitute, during recent fiscal years NCCAN convened grantee cluster meetings in Washington, D.C., instead of making on-site visits to individual grantees, enabling NCCAN's project officers to meet with groups of grantees. According to NCCAN officials, these cluster meetings put project managers in personal contact with most grantees at least once during each fiscal year. NCCAN officials also said that the cluster meetings allow the grantees to exchange program information and results from their discretionary grant projects.

These cluster meetings, however, do not provide for the in-depth evaluations of grant projects envisioned in the HHS and OHDS grant administration manuals. Furthermore, grantee officials do not bring grant project-related documentation to these meetings for review by project officers. Despite the positive aspects of these cluster meetings, we believe that they are not a substitute for on-site monitoring of grantees. If its staffing and travel budget levels increase, NCCAN may again be able to schedule on-site monitoring visits to grantee locations.

## NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE

CAPTA mandated that NCCAN establish a national clearinghouse, either directly or through a competitive contract of at least 3 years, to maintain, coordinate, and disseminate information relating to the incidence of child abuse and neglect, and to compile data on programs that were successful in preventing, identifying, and treating child abuse and neglect.

Currently, NCCAN awards grants and contracts for four clearinghouse operations: (1) the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, (2) the Clearinghouse on Family Violence, (3) the People of Color Leadership Institute (POCLI), and (4) the National Information Clearinghouse for Infants With Disabilities and Life Threatening Conditions (Baby Doe). The Baby Doe clearinghouse and POCLI are funded through NCCAN's discretionary grants program; the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect and Clearinghouse on Family Violence are funded jointly through one contract.

This contract, awarded in May 1990, was protested by an unsuccessful bidder. In July 1990 and again in February 1991, the Small Business Administration determined that the current contractor was ineligible to receive a small business set aside contract. As a result, NCCAN has initiated the procurement process again for the clearinghouse contract and plans to award a



new contract during July 1991. The current contract expires on May 17, 1991, but will be extended through July 1991 so that essential services will not be interrupted.

Despite these contracting difficulties, thousands of telephone calls and letters are handled annually in responding to various requesters, according to reports submitted to NCCAN by the contractors. We were not able to assess the accuracy or substance of these reports, however, in preparing for this hearing.

#### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING

CAPTA requires NCCAN to make available technical assistance and training to its grantees, as well as other public and private agencies and professionals that provide services to prevent, identify, and treat child abuse and neglect. According to NCCAN officials, most technical assistance is provided through the four clearinghouses and seven resource centers. Most training development and delivery activities are funded through discretionary grants. NCCAN officials told us that some grantees and contractors are also awarded funds to provide technical assistance and training. Currently, NCCAN has 18 active grants and 5 contracts totaling about \$7 million<sup>2</sup> to develop and provide

---

<sup>2</sup>Includes total actual and projected federal funds for active multi-year grants and actual and projected contract costs for fiscal years 1990-91.

training and technical assistance. NCCAN officials stated that its project officers and grant management staff also provide some technical assistance to grantees during cluster group meetings and to grantees and others during telephone discussions.

According to NCCAN officials, quantitative data on technical assistance provided by its staff, contractors, or grantees are not compiled or reported, except for the clearinghouses, and no one has evaluated the quantity or quality of the technical assistance provided by NCCAN. Likewise no one has surveyed grantees to determine whether they believe the technical assistance and training received through NCCAN were adequate and timely. As part of its normal operations, we believe NCCAN should be evaluating the effectiveness of its training and technical assistance efforts. As a minimum, NCCAN should periodically survey grantees to obtain their views on the assistance and training provided to them.

#### NATIONAL DATA SYSTEM

As required under CAPTA, NCCAN has initiated the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, which will be used to collect standardized summary data and detailed case data on the incidence of substantiated and unfounded reports of child abuse and neglect, as well as, the number of deaths due to child abuse. The system, designed under a fiscal year 1988 contract,

has been tested in nine states. NCCAN plans to implement the system in other states, a few at a time, but a specific schedule has not been developed for when other states would begin using the system.

According to the implementation plan for this system, states will collect calendar year 1990 summary data based on their own data systems and provide NCCAN with aggregate data in early fiscal year 1992. NCCAN officials told us that the states are participating in this effort voluntarily.

To further implement the system, by the end of fiscal year 1991, NCCAN plans to award a 4-year contract to (1) provide technical assistance to states as they design their data systems, (2) provide on-site consultation and training for counties in states where child abuse and neglect programs are administered at the county level, (3) conduct a series of national and regional workshops for peer groups and vendors who plan to compete for contracts to operate and maintain state data systems, and (4) design the reports to be generated from the new national data system.

The need for nationwide standardized data on the incidence of child abuse and neglect has been recognized and NCCAN has taken the first steps to implement such a data system. How soon this

system becomes a reality, however, remains a question because of funding and state participation uncertainties.

#### REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

CAPTA requires NCCAN to conduct studies and report its findings to appropriate congressional committees in the following areas: (1) incidence of child abuse among children with handicaps, (2) incidence of child abuse in alcoholic families; (3) guardian-ad-litem program (how individual legal representation of children in cases of child abuse or neglect is provided in each State); and (4) child abuse in high-risk groups. The reports on these studies were due to the Congress not later than 2 years after CAPTA's enactment--April 25, 1990. In addition, the Act requires NCCAN to report on (1) efforts to coordinate objectives and activities of federal agencies and organizations responsible for child abuse and neglect programs and activities and (2) the effectiveness of state programs and technical assistance of programs conducted under the victims of crimes provision of CAPTA. To date only the guardian-ad-litem report has been issued (October 1990).

According to NCCAN officials, the other mandated reports are in various phases of review, but are expected to be issued no later than September 30, 1991. Some NCCAN officials commented that OHOS' review process for written documents was redundant and

time consuming and that the lack of NCCAN staff contributed to the reports being late.

#### INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The Inter-agency Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, established in accordance with CAPTA requirements, brought together 31 representatives from the Office of Personnel Management and agencies within eight federal departments. The task force first convened in June 1989. The task force's April 1990 report, transmitted a plan for coordinating federal activities on child abuse and neglect, identified six areas through which federal agencies affect issues related to child abuse and neglect, defined problems in each area, and suggested ways the federal government could improve coordination. It recommended activities to implement these suggestions and submitted these recommendations to the Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect for its consideration. NCCAN has satisfied CAPTA's requirement of obtaining representation on the task force of federal agencies responsible for programs and activities related to child abuse and neglect. It is too early, however, to determine the full impact of the task force's efforts and products.

## NCCAN'S STAFFING AND BUDGET

Since fiscal year 1980 OHDS has experienced a decline in staffing, while its legislated responsibilities have increased. Specifically, OHDS' full-time equivalents (FTEs) steadily declined from 1,744 in fiscal year 1980 to 975 in fiscal year 1991, while 16 new programs were established. Staffing information for prior years on components within OHDS (ACYF and NCCAN) was not readily available. According to an associate commissioner in ACYF, however, the fiscal year 1990 ACYF staffing level was 143, down from 218 in fiscal year 1981. In fiscal years 1990 and 1991, NCCAN's approved staffing level was 21, but 7 positions remained unfilled, leaving the Center with 14 full-time staff. As of May 3, 1991, 6 of the unfilled positions, were for experienced child welfare program specialists and social science research analysts at grades GS-9 to GS-13.

Over the years, shortages in experienced staff have adversely affected NCCAN's ability to manage child abuse and neglect activities and programs. A report by HHS' Office of the Inspector General, internal HHS documents, and discussions with agency officials indicated that staff shortages have caused work delays, reduced or prevented oversight activities of grantees, and resulted in heavy workloads for existing staff. For example,

OHDS' 1990 Objectives Tracking System<sup>3</sup> Report showed that the National Incidence Study on Child Maltreatment, planned to begin in fiscal year 1990, was delayed until fiscal year 1991 because of inadequate staff and expertise needed to prepare the necessary documents to process and award the contract.

During fiscal years 1989-1991, OHDS undertook several initiatives to increase staffing, but NCCAN's full-time staff has not increased. In May 1989 OHDS obtained permission from the Congress to reprogram funds to support a plan to increase its staffing level by 37. Of the total additional staff in OHDS resulting from the reprogramming action, 10 were allotted to ACYF. Of these, 2 were allotted to the Children's Bureau, but none to NCCAN. After these planned allotments were decided, however, staffing priorities in OHDS were revised and 8 of the 10 ACYF positions were canceled and reallocated to the immediate office of the Assistant Secretary of OHDS.

During fiscal year 1990, NCCAN requested and was allotted funds to fill three vacant positions. A self-imposed OHDS policy, which generally prohibits the hiring of anyone above a GS-9 grade level from outside the organization, however, prevented NCCAN from recruiting the higher graded, experienced professional staff needed to carry out its responsibilities. Furthermore, at the

---

<sup>3</sup>A computerized file through which the agency tracks its progress in achieving annual goals and objectives.

end of fiscal year 1990, OHDS withdrew NCCAN's hiring authority for the three positions because revised estimates showed there would be insufficient funds in OHDS' salaries and expense account.

In April 1991, HHS requested permission to reprogram fiscal year 1991 funds to increase OHDS' staffing level. According to agency officials, NCCAN requested funds to fill the six vacant positions to administer its research and development grants and the newly funded \$19.5 million Emergency Services Program<sup>4</sup>, and to create a new deputy director position.

The Director of OHDS' Office of Management Services told us in March 1991 that OHDS planned to decentralize the management of its salaries and expense account, which would give component officials, including NCCAN's, the latitude to manage their salaries and expense accounts as they see fit. This would permit NCCAN to hire experienced staff if it desired. Because of the consolidation of OHDS and the Family Support Administration, we are not certain whether this planned decentralization of the management of salaries and expenses accounts will occur.

---

<sup>4</sup>Authorized by section 107(a) of CAPTA, but not funded until January 1991, this program will provide comprehensive multi-disciplinary and coordinated services to children whose parents are substance abusers.



Filling its vacant positions with experienced staff with expertise in child abuse and neglect issues may address some of the problems and shortcomings NCCAN has experienced during recent years. We are not sure, however, that a full complement of staff would enable NCCAN to handle the workload generated in administering about 300 complex and diverse grants annually.

- - - - -

In conclusion, even though NCCAN has addressed the requirements of CAPTA to varying degrees, staff shortages continue to keep it from fully carrying out its mission and the requirements mandated by CAPTA. Therefore, NCCAN's ability to perform its role as the nation's leader in identifying, preventing, and treating child abuse and neglect, is subject to question if staff and resource shortages continue. Furthermore, we have long been concerned about HHS's ability to adequately manage its grant workload and are concerned that NCCAN may repeat past administrative failures noted in our reports that span the last decade.

We have been told that the plans for the organization of the recently established Administration for Children and Families, and how NCCAN and its programs will be affected, are still being developed. If NCCAN issues and programs are not given priority attention within the newly established operating division, however, the Congress may wish to consider either reducing its expectations for NCCAN or achieving the goals of CAPTA by other means.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.