



**“Redundancy and Duplication in Federal Child Welfare Programs:  
A Case Study in Executive Branch Reorganization”  
Testimony Before the House Committee on Government Reform and  
Oversight  
May 20, 2004**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It’s an honor to be back before this committee to once again discuss an issue that I know is close to your heart — and is close to mine.

The fragmentation of federal child protection services and funding in the United States today is an embarrassment.

For decades, Congress has appropriated more and more money into more and more programs, only to find that the numbers of neglected, malnourished, and abused children remain unacceptably high.

The problem is real, and it is acute, and the response at the state and especially the federal level has been reactive and clumsy.

Meanwhile, because politicians from both parties can report to the American people our apparently generous appropriations — a few million here for child abuse prevention, a few billion there for foster-care assistance — the American people have the false impression that the government is in fact taking care of these kids.

But the evidence shows the government is doing no such thing. In fact, it shows quite the contrary.

I do not mean to cast aspersions, for I have been in Congress myself for 20 years while trends have not appreciably improved. Congresses and presidential administrations of both parties merit their share of the blame, but the fact remains.

Kids are dying, Mr. Chairman. And it’s our fault.

In our defense, abused and neglected children are hardly ignored in federal law.

The latest estimates indicate some 33 federal agencies, bureaus, and offices handle 51 programs and 46 different funding streams to address child protection.

All of these account for billions of dollars.

Meanwhile, a White House report on disadvantaged youth shows that 339 federal programs are specifically charged with helping children in one way or another, and 13 federal agencies administer more than 120 different programs that provide for mentoring alone.

And it should be noted for the record that the Office of Management and Budget has rated 68 percent of those 339 programs as either “results not demonstrated” or “ineffective.”

It should be further noted that more than half of them have not received a *thorough*, top-to-bottom evaluation in the last five years.

Meanwhile, if this committee — and Congress, generally — are concerned about the duplication and lack of coordination in these many programs and offices, not to worry: there are two *separate* interagency working groups at the Department of Health and Human Services to coordinate federal child-abuse prevention activities.

And we have recently learned there are plans to create a third.

However well-intentioned the current system may be, Mr. Chairman, its duplication of efforts, redundant programs, and lack of coordination have not served abused and neglected kids.

These facts are heartbreaking to anyone who cares about children.

This isn't merely a matter of governmental inefficiency or mission creep — it is a failure of imagination and of will.

The federal solutions to the problem of abused and neglected children that we have relied on all our lives are not working, and while each of us can send out press releases touting this new program or that new grant, kids are still hurting.

Again, I don't mean to assign blame to any individual. These problems are much bigger than one person. They have grown, in fact, to a size much greater than the 435 people who work in this building, and yet it is up to Congress and the president to act.

There are things we can and should do to help, Mr. Chairman, but they do not include the creation of new layers of programs, funding streams, and working groups plopped on top of the old ones.

We need a fundamental reimagining of the federal role in protecting kids.

We spend billions of dollars that could do much, much more good if they reached the right children at the right time.

All the money in the world won't help if it's soaked up by redundant and ineffective bureaucracies.

We need a restructured system that targets resources where they can help, and that is practically impossible in the current bureaucratic environment.

I therefore strongly urge the committee to do two things.

First, look with skepticism on any plans emanating from within Congress or the executive branch that simply aggravate current bureaucratic inefficiencies.

And second, act to restore to the president government reorganization authority so that our child protection services can finally start to serve the children instead of serving the bureaucracy.