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## Consensus Statement Released A child wearing a face covering, during a global pandemic, is not child abuse

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**September 16<sup>th</sup>** – Today, the Center for Children’s Justice (C4CJ) released a Consensus Statement -endorsed by dozens of organizations and individuals – to strongly refute statements that a child wearing a face covering, during a global pandemic, is tantamount to child abuse.

*“Let’s get right to the point – wearing a face mask is not child abuse, stressed **Cathleen Palm, Founder of C4CJ**. “Too rarely is the voice of the abused child heard or the child’s harrowing experiences understood by the general public or most elected officials. It is shocking then how child abuse is being distorted in the course of the fiery debates regarding public health strategies intended to mitigate COVID19.”*

**A parent from Erie County** endorsed the statement writing, *“A mask is to protect all people, children and adults, from any harm of sickness and even death. Child abuse is defined, in part, as an act that results in a child experiencing bodily injury or sexual abuse. There is a big difference.”*

**Jo Ellen Bowman, who leads Armstrong County’s children’s advocacy center (CAC)**, reinforced, *“Child abuse victims often feel that they don’t matter. Those who equate a child wearing a mask with child abuse seem indifferent to the unrelenting, often life-long, trauma a child experiences due to abuse.”* CACs serve as a neutral child-friendly setting where a child, reported as abused, can be interviewed, receive medical care or other services undertaken in the course of a child abuse investigation and to promote the child’s healing.

**Dr. Philip Scribano, DO, MSCE**, underscored, *“As a physician, the association of child abuse with the use of masks as a primary public health measure to protect children, is not only grossly erroneous thinking, it is offensive to those children who have been abused, and the work done to protect children from abuse in our Commonwealth.”*

In endorsing the Consensus Statement, **Lynn Carson, who leads a CAC serving Central Pennsylvania counties**, wrote, *“It is disturbing that elected officials are given a platform to espouse incorrect statements, which further fuel the divisiveness that contributes to the spread of COVID.”*

**Grace Coleman**, who assists child victims and survivors of domestic violence at Crisis Center North, stressed, *“Inviting a child to wear a face mask is the exact opposite of child abuse. It’s a preventive health measure in the midst of a global pandemic.”*

**Dr. Rachel Berger, MD, MPH**, concluded, *“Equating wearing a mask to child abuse demonstrates a lack of compassion and understanding of what it means to be a victim of child abuse.”*

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