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Consensus Statementⁱ

We are deeply troubled by a growing chorus of Pennsylvanians, including some elected officials, who are equating child abuse with a child wearing a face covering intended to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.ⁱⁱⁱ

Such claims brazenly diminish the harsh reality of child abuse and demonstrate a callous disregard for the life-long physical, emotional and economic impact of child abuse.

In point of fact, there is NO similarity between face coverings and actions that interfere with a child's airway such as has occurred here in the Commonwealth:

- In Mifflin County, a child's parent pleaded guilty to aggravated assault and endangering the welfare of a child after using electrical tape to force an object into an infant's mouth. This infant also suffered brain damage from violent shaking.^{iv}
- In Bucks County a child-care employee was criminally charged with endangering a child, who previously was diagnosed with asthma, because the adult put tape over the child's mouth to keep the child quiet.^v
- In another Pennsylvania community it was the driver who transported young children to and from a taxpayer supported behavioral health program held to account for taping a child's mouth shut.^{vi}

As an additional point of fact, there is nothing in Pennsylvania's Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) that would, in any way, equate child abuse with a child wearing a face covering during a global pandemic.

In 2013, the Pennsylvania Senate and the Pennsylvania House of Representatives unanimously voted to amend the definition of child abuse to include situations where someone "intentionally, knowingly or recklessly" took an action that interfered "with the breathing of a child".^{vii} State lawmakers acted in direct response to repeated concerns, often raised by health care professionals, about the fear experienced and harm caused to a child whose mouth is taped shut or a sock or another object placed in the child's mouth to prevent the child from speaking and/or crying. The statute also addresses situations where a parent intentionally suffocates their child - sometimes repeatedly, as in cases of medical child abuse.

As the examples above illustrate, too often frustrated or negligent adults, including those caring for crying infants or children with intellectual disabilities perceived as *acting out*, make choices that clearly interfere with the child's breathing and can result in serious, sometimes lethal, consequences for the child.



We understand that, collectively as a society we are under stress and this global pandemic and the needed mitigation strategies have frayed our nerves and patience. Clearly, we also are living through a highly politicized period in which discussions and decision-making are not nearly as thoughtful and respectful as they ought to be or that our children rightly deserve.

Even in these turbulent times, however, we cannot excuse or minimize child abuse.

To those who want to minimize children or manipulate the abused child, be assured we are watching and we will always speak up for and stand with every child, especially the abused child.

Coalition/Organizational signers

- Robin Adams, **ImPACT - Protecting Against Childhood Trauma**
- Kelliann Amico, **Justice for Maxwell**
- Anne Ard, **Centre Safe**
- Karen Baker, **Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape**
- Cheryl Bettigole, MD, MPH, **Philadelphia Department of Health**
- Jo Ellen Bowman, **Kay's Cottage**
- Rebecca Brady, **A Child's Place PA**
- Steve Catanese, **SEIU Local 668**
- Mary Carrasco, MD, **A Child's Place PA**
- Lynn Carson, **UPMC Child Advocacy Center of Central PA**
- Grace Coleman, **Crisis Center North**
- Penelope Ettinger, **Network of Victim Assistance (Bucks County)**
- David Fair, **Turning Points for Children**
- Cynthia Figueroa, **Office of Children and Families, City of Philadelphia**
- Ife Changa Ford, **St. Christopher's Hospital for Children**
- Michelle Gibb, **Alle-Kiski Area HOPE Center, Inc.**
- Reverend Brenda Gregg, **Destiny of Faith Church**
- Andrea Lewis Hamer, **A Child's Place PA**
- Bruce Harlan, **Women's Services, Inc.**
- Laine Hissett, **Suffer the Little Children Podcast**
- Danae G Hoose, **A Child's Place PA**
- Chris Kirchner, **Children's Advocacy Centers of PA**
- Deborah Gordon Klehr, **Education Law Center**
- Jo Kelly MD, **Reading Pediatrics**
- Carol Leonard, **Child Advocates of Blair County**
- Paul Lukach, **Crime Victim Center of Erie County**
- Nicole Molinaro, **Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh**
- Karen A Morris, MD, **A Child's Place PA**
- Annette G. Myarick, **Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics**
- Abbie Newman, RN, JD, **Mission Kids Child Advocacy Center**
- Teresa Olsen, **Prevent Child Abuse PA**
- Cathleen Palm, **The Center for Children's Justice**
- Wendy Robison, **The Pennsylvania Association of School Nurses and Practitioners**
- Colleen Sauls, **The Children's Health Center (Berks County)**
- Jeanette Slimmer, **The Pennsylvania Association of School Nurses and Practitioners**



- Rita Marie Swan, **founder Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty**
- Ashley Gay Vocco, **Family Services Inc of Blair County**
- Pamela Wallace, **Project CHILD**
- Deanna Weaver, **Crime Victims Alliance of Pennsylvania**

Individual signers

- **Norrell Atkinson, MD**, Philadelphia
- **Cathy Badal, Esq.**, Berks County
- **Rachel Berger, MD, MPH**, Allegheny County
- **Dee Dee Blosnich**, Allegheny County
- **Larry Breitenstein**, Westmoreland County
- **Pat Bruno, MD, FAAP**, Snyder County
- **Constance Burnett**, Erie County
- **Cindy Christian, MD**, Philadelphia
- **Erin K Churico, MSN, CPNP**, Berks County
- **Alex Ciotti**, Cambria County
- **Kathryn Crowell MD**, Dauphin County
- **Christi Daubert**, Lebanon County
- **Kate DeLosso**, Delaware County
- **Lori Frasier, MD**, Dauphin County
- **Devon George**, Allegheny County
- **Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz**, Berks County
- **Jackie Hoover**, Allegheny County
- **Judith Horgan**, Allegheny County
- **Nicolas Jaramillo**
- **Debra Esernio-Jensen, MD**, Lehigh County
- **Michelle Kissinger, PhD**, Berks County
- **Karen Kohr**, Lebanon County
- **Ruth Kolb, Esq.**, Allegheny County
- **Carol Lavery**, Luzerne County (Former Commonwealth Victim Advocate)
- **Janet MacKay**, Wyoming County
- **Meredith Matone, DrPH MHS**, Montgomery County
- **Andrea McColgan**, Berks County
- **Meredith McDermott**, Allegheny County
- **Marilyn Mercado**, Lehigh County
- **Joan Mills**, Allegheny County
- **Patricia Murray**, Berks County
- **Sharon Peters**, Allegheny County
- **Renee Riddle, MD**, Berks County
- **Cynthia Schadder, MD**, Berks County
- **Elizabeth Schmoyer**, Berks County
- **Philip Scribano, DO, MSCE**, Philadelphia
- **Sharon Scullion, Esq.**, Berks County
- **Connie Shope, CRNP**, Allegheny County
- **Nicole Smith, LSW**, Dauphin County
- **Amy Sula**, Allegheny County
- **Letty Thall**, Philadelphia



- **Karen Wang, MD**, Berks County
- **Jason Ware**, Westmoreland County
- **Joanne Wood, MD**, Montgomery County

ⁱ Those individuals and organizations endorsing this statement are included below. For questions, please contact Cathleen Palm at 717-215-1440 or contact@C4CJ.org.

ⁱⁱ Do face masks harm children? Penn State Children’s Hospital doctor says no written by David Wenner published by PennLive on August 20, 2021 retrieved at <https://www.pennlive.com/news/2021/08/do-face-masks-harm-children-penn-state-childrens-hospital-doctor-says-no.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lebanon County legislator Russ Diamond tweets “a masked child is an abused child” in “self-explanatory” meme written by Lebtown staff published September 1, 2021 <https://lebtown.com/2020/07/10/lebanon-county-legislator-russ-diamond-tweets-a-masked-child-is-an-abused-child-in-self-explanatory-meme/>.

^{iv} OTN: U 687878-2

^v OTN: H 418789-0

^{vi} ‘How could they do that to my kid?’: Parents sue state-funded van service after preschoolers tied up with duct tape by Nina FeldmanRyan Briggs published by WHYY on February 24, 2020.

^{vii} <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/Legis/LI/uconsCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&yr=2013&sessInd=0&smthLwInd=0&act=108>

