

March 3, 2011 (Same letter for Senator Schumer)

The Honorable Adam Schiff
U.S. House of Representatives
2447 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Schiff:

On behalf of the thousands of organizations across this country who provide services to youth — including mentoring programs, clubs, summer camps, afterschool programs, and more — we again commend you for supporting and introducing *The Child Protection Improvements Act*. This legislation would create a permanent national system making FBI fingerprint searches on potential volunteers and staff accessible to youth-serving organizations.

The need to move this legislation forward has become urgent as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has informed the organizations currently participating in the PROTECT Act Child Safety Pilot that they will no longer be able to support the pilot as of March 31, 2011 — thus effectively ending the pilot, and leaving our organizations with no access to FBI fingerprint-based checks in two-thirds of the states!

It takes millions of volunteers and youth workers to offer the enriching experiences that our organizations provide for millions of young people each year. Our affiliates must be able to effectively and reliably screen these volunteers and employees to ensure they do not have an inappropriate criminal past that might endanger the young people we seek to help.

FBI fingerprint checks are the most complete and reliable means of checking an individual's criminal record, and are the only type of check that is truly available on a nationwide basis. Unfortunately, the current background check system is not widely accessible for youth-serving organizations. All FBI requests must go through state agencies, but **only one-third of states even allow** a wide range of youth-serving organizations to access federal searches. Even when FBI searches are accessible, they are often prohibitively expensive and time-consuming.

We know from the existing PROTECT Act Child Safety Pilot that FBI searches do provide information that is absolutely critical for screening youth-serving volunteers and employees. More than 6 percent of the nearly 69,000 volunteers screened with FBI searches during the pilot had criminal records of concern — including extremely serious crimes like child sexual abuse, cruelty to children, and even murder. In addition, more than 41 percent of individuals with criminal records had crimes in states other than where they were applying to volunteer — meaning that only a nationwide check would have caught the criminal records.

The Child Protection Improvements Act would build on the lessons learned through the Child Safety Pilot and finally solve this problem for youth-serving organizations of all kinds, in all states. The bill creates an applicant processing center to conduct FBI fingerprint searches for youth-serving organizations — in a streamlined and efficient way and at a reasonable cost. The Attorney General establishes a criminal history review program to review criminal records and make determinations as to whether the individuals screened are appropriate to work with children. It makes FBI fingerprint searches accessible, affordable, and timely — exactly what our

organizations need to effectively screen out any potential employees or volunteers who could harm rather than support a child.

We fully support this legislation and will do whatever we can to ensure its passage this year. Again, we are extremely grateful for your unwavering support and look forward to seeing this through to the end in the 112th Congress.

We are grateful for your leadership on this issue, and will advocate for passage of *The Child Protection Improvements Act*.

Sincerely,

Afterschool Alliance
America's Promise Alliance
American Camp Association
Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies
Big Brothers, Big Sisters of America
Boys and Girls Clubs of America
Camp Fire USA
Communities In Schools
Covenant House International
First Focus Campaign for Children
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Healthy Teen Network
MENTOR
National Collaboration for Youth
National Foster Care Coalition
National Network for Youth
Save the Children, United States Programs
The Salvation Army, USA
Volunteers of America
YMCA of the USA