



Durbin, Davis Call for Increased Support for Children Traumatized by Violence Following GAO Report Findings

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Representative Danny Davis (D-IL-07) today called for increased support, workforce training, and services for children who have experienced trauma after a Government Accountability Office (GAO) [study](#) they requested revealed that states face challenges in identifying and supporting children who experience trauma. Next month, Durbin and Davis will introduce bipartisan, bicameral legislation that seeks to address the challenges in today's study and will build off sweeping federal legislation they passed in 2018 to help children who are exposed to trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

“We requested today’s study because Representative Davis and I want to continue finding strategies to address the impact that community violence and other traumatic experiences have on our children. Too many kids in Chicago and nationwide carry this burden of trauma and too often, there’s not a helping hand for them to cope and thrive. The science tells us that this can harm healthy development and academic success, and feed into a cycle of violence and poverty. I’ve worked for years to tackle this problem, and we will be introducing abill to address it soon,” Durbin said.

“We are all too often confronted with the horror of gun violence in the headlines. But, as this report reaffirms, the profound, lasting impact of the trauma inflicted on our children by a pervasive climate of violence in our society goes further and deeper and persists even more malignantly then has been generally acknowledged. This legislation is both a next step in addressing that trauma and, we hope, a catalyst for an ongoing reorientation of how we as a nation, view and address this epidemic,” Davis said.

Today's GAO report examined federal and state efforts to identify and support children exposed to trauma, and identified several best practices and funding sources used by states. The report also highlighted key challenges states face in supporting children exposed to trauma, including workforce recruitment and retention and inadequate funding.

In 2017, Durbin and Davis introduced the *Trauma-Informed Care for Children and Families Act* to support children who have been exposed to ACEs and trauma, such as witnessing violence, parental addiction, or abuse. Trauma can create stress on the developing brain and force children into constant "survival mode." Decades of research have established the link between a child's exposure to trauma, its effect on neurological and behavioral development, and long-term negative outcomes. Exposure to trauma contributes to many of the societal challenges we face today, including the opioid crisis, chronic disease development, mental illness, violence, unemployment, and the academic achievement gap.

Major provisions of the *Trauma Informed Care for Children and Families Act* were signed into law last year as part of the *SUPPORT for Patients and Families Act*, a major bipartisan legislative package aimed at addressing the opioid crisis. The bill included major reforms to better identify and support children who have experienced trauma by:

- Creating a federal task force to coordinate federal efforts, establish a national strategy, and recommend best practices for identify, referring, and supporting children that have experienced trauma;
- Promoting trauma-informed care in dozens of additional federal grant programs, and improving data collection from states on exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences by authorizing funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;
- Creating a new \$50 million mental health in schools pilot program to integrate services, and increase student access to care;
- Increasing the funding authorization by \$17 million (up to \$64 million, the highest-ever funding level) for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, which provides grants to community organizations and universities to improve trauma-informed care; and
- Investing in the mental health workforce by expanding the National Health Service Corps loan repayment program, and enhancing masters-level graduate school education for behavioral health and social work professionals.

A 2013 study found that in the Chicago communities most impacted by violence, one in three kids ages 15 to 17 had lost a close friend or family member to violence and nearly one in five had witnessed a murder firsthand. Nearly 35 million children in the United States have had at least one serious traumatic experience by age 17. Far too many kids carry the emotional weight of community violence and other traumatic experiences, such as the daily stress of abuse or neglect at home, a parent battling addiction, or an incarceration or a deportation of a loved one. Yet only a small fraction of the children in need of support to address trauma receive such care. Nationally, more than 75 percent of children in need of mental health services do not receive the appropriate care.