

## **Trauma-Informed Care for Children and Families Act**

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) & Rep. Danny Davis (D-IL-7)

**Background:** Studies show that childhood exposure to traumatic events can have a profound long-term impact on mental and physical health, high school graduation, and poverty. When children experience traumatic events in their community—being victims or witnesses of violence, living in fear of deportation, experiencing parental substance abuse, or living in serious poverty—stress is inflicted on the developing brain, which can impact social-emotional wellbeing and force children into survival mode. While a child’s natural response to this trauma may result in difficulty paying attention or regulating emotions, it can often be overlooked or misunderstood—leading to school suspensions, poor student achievement, or escalation of conflicts. Trauma and its effects are often exacerbated for children of color.

**The Need in Our Communities:** Nationally, nearly 35 million children have had at least one serious traumatic experience, and nearly two-thirds of children have been exposed to violence.

- A 2012 study found that when young students in Chicago were examined within a week of a homicide that occurred near their home, the children exhibited lower levels of attention, impulse control, and cognitive skills.
- In Chicago Public Schools, 30 percent of students with a reported personal history of abuse or neglect received an out-of-school suspension during the 2013-14 school year.
- A 2004 study of the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center found that 92 percent of detained youth had experienced a trauma.

Too few children who experience trauma are identified and supported with the right care. While a child with a cut or broken bones would normally receive immediate treatment, a child who witnesses a shooting or experiences abuse at home may not receive any help or support. And those who never receive help can carry the weight of these emotional scars for life.

**The Solution:** Schools, health care, social services, child welfare, first responders, and the justice system must all have the tools and federal support to recognize trauma and coordinate services to mitigate the effects of trauma on children.

**Legislation:** Senator Durbin and Congressman Davis have introduced legislation that would:

- *Identify Best Practices.* Creates a federal task force to establish best practices for identifying and providing support to children that have experienced trauma;
- *Disseminate Best Practices.* Provides more teachers, doctors, social service providers, and first responders with the tools and understanding to help children who have experienced trauma by allowing funding for several federal grant programs to be used for this training;
- *Expand Treatment Capacity.* Expands Medicaid coverage for child trauma services, increases mental health care in schools, and enlists trained mentors and community leaders to help;
- *Support the Workforce.* Expands loan repayment and graduate school behavioral health training programs, and enhances teacher training programs;
- *Foster Community Coordination.* Creates a grant program to bring together stakeholders to identify needs, collect data, and target efforts. Also allows communities to pool federal grants from multiple agencies and focus the funding on increasing trauma services for children.