



Florida Chapter

American Academy of Pediatrics

**Florida Chapter of the
American Academy of
Pediatrics, Inc.**

1400 Village Square Blvd.,
#3-87786
Tallahassee, FL 32312
(P) 850/224-3939
(E) info@fcaap.org

FCAAP Executive Board

President

D. Paul Robinson, MD, FAAP

Immediate Past President

Madeline Matar Joseph, MD,
FAAP

Vice President

Lisa Gwynn, DO, FAAP

Secretary

Toni Richards-Rowley, MD,
FAAP

Treasurer

Patricia Emmanuel, MD, FAAP

Via hand delivery by Mr. Doug Bell, Esq.

Representative Cord Byrd
308 House Office Building
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

January 9, 2020

RE: Importance of Child Protection Teams and Child Abuse Pediatricians

Dear Representative Byrd,

As you are aware, recent news reports have contained inaccurate and misleading information about child abuse pediatricians, and this letter serves to provide you with important background and evidence about the critically important work that Child Protection Teams and Child Abuse Pediatricians do.

Nationally, 672,000 children are known to be maltreated every year, and 4 to 5 children die every day as a result of abuse. According to the Florida Child Abuse Death Review Committee, an average of 140 children die of abuse or neglect each year in Florida. Between June 30, 2018 – July 1, 2019, the Florida Department of Children & Families Child Abuse Hotline accepted (screened in) 219,656 reports of child abuse or neglect. In that same period there were 16,874 cases referred to and reviewed by a Child Protection Team (CPT) for medical evaluation. Of those 16,874 cases, the CPTs determined that 39% were Positive Findings for Abuse or Neglect; 21% were Indeterminate (Experts Can't be Sure); and 40% were No Findings (Not Abuse or Neglect).

In Florida, we are fortunate to have a statutorily created network of 22 Child Protection Teams consisting of caseworkers, nurses, myriad specialist physicians, and a pediatrician Medical Director. All CPT Medical Directors have either taken a Florida Certification Board examination for competency or are board-certified Child Abuse Pediatricians having passed a national certifying examination – both of which require significant training and testing. No other physician has as much training in distinguishing accidental injuries from intentional injuries or in spotting the rare conditions that often look like abuse. Studies have shown that when a case of suspected child abuse is referred to a Child Abuse Pediatrician (CAP) by a non-CAP physician, the CAP will classify the case as non-abuse 22% to 44% of the time¹. These studies suggest that CAPs are less likely to overcall abuse when compared to other physicians or child welfare workers.

It is also important to note that CPT Medical Directors work as part of a team that includes other medical and surgical specialists, nurses, child welfare workers and law enforcement officers. The diagnosis from the CPT Medical Director is not

the only factor in determining whether a child is removed from a parent's custody.

When there are questions about the CPT medical provider's opinion, DCF and law enforcement personnel can request a second opinion from the Statewide Medical Director for Child Protection. The Statewide Medical Director is a sub-board certified Child Abuse Pediatrician with 49 years' experience in general pediatrics and 43 years' experience in child abuse and neglect. He provides impartial, unbiased reviews when requested. Family attorneys can also request these second opinions but generally prefer to obtain second opinions from those they can rely upon to provide opinions that support their case.

Ultimately, we all share the same goal of protecting children and preventing abuse. When we are able to intervene effectively, we can begin a process of healing for the entire family. When children present with a minor, "sentinel" injury – such as a bruise on an infant who is not mobile – often caregivers can intervene to support the family and prevent further abuse. Tragically there are still too many cases where children's injuries are overlooked and a child dies or suffers a permanent injury.

The Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics is proud that our membership includes Child Abuse Pediatricians who have dedicated their lives to working on extremely disturbing and stressful cases in order to protect children from abuse and neglect. Of course, no medical professional is able to discuss the details of any of any child abuse cases due to HIPAA and other privacy laws, but I am happy to discuss these issues with you further and connect you with CAPs who can elaborate on their practice in greater detail.

On behalf of FCAAP,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "D. Paul Robinson".

D. Paul Robinson, M.D., F.A.A.P.
President, Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics