

## Key Points

- Too often, child abuse goes undetected because of gaps in our child protection system. Through the “Silent Tears” project, South Carolina’s front-line child protection professionals have spent the last two years identifying these weaknesses so that we can address them.
- Now that the “Silent Tears” team has released its report, we’re here today to announce steps we’re taking in the Governor’s Office and within the Greenville Health System to make children safer in South Carolina.
- Many of these recommendations relate to improved training and outreach. These are areas where DSS’ state and local officials play a key role, along with Guardian ad Litem and its 2,600 statewide volunteers.

## Silent Tears – Background

- “Silent Tears” is the name of a report commissioned by private funders and written by Victor I. Veith, who is the Executive Director of the National Child Protection Training Center at Winona State University (Minnesota). The author interviewed more than 160 people associated with child welfare while preparing the report.
- The report was publicly unveiled in May at a well-attended upstate press event (Tim Scott, Trey Gowdy, Alan Wilson, etc.).
- The report takes a broad view of South Carolina’s current institutions and practices associated with preventing and responding to child abuse (especially sexual abuse). The review encompassed:
  - ACTORS – The courts, DSS, healthcare professionals, social workers, law enforcement, parents
  - PRACTICES – Undergraduate and graduate training, evidence collection, mandated reporting
- The report makes a number of recommendations that touch upon essentially all aspects of the child protection system. Today’s speakers are responsible for:
  - GOVERNOR: DSS caseworkers, Guardian ad Litem volunteers
  - GREENVILLE HEALTH SYSTEM: Medical students and front-line healthcare professionals

## Definitions

- (MDT) Multi-Disciplinary Team: A group of agencies working together to prevent and detect child abuse...law enforcement, DSS, mental health, prosecutors, child and victim advocates
- (CAC) Child Advocacy Center: A child-focused, facility-based programs with representatives from many disciplines working together to effectively investigate, prosecute, and treat child abuse.

## We’ve Already Doing Some of What Was Recommended

- The report recommends that an agency in each multi-disciplinary team (MDT) host a “prevention planning day” to look at recent cases and discuss how abuse could have been prevented.
- In 2011, DSS started holding P2 (Palmetto Power) open meetings, every other month, to share actual case data as well as meta and trend data with child welfare professionals. The goal is to (1) identify the causes of child abuse and neglect and (2) develop strategies to prevent and reduce recurrence.
- The MDTs and CACs are invited and regularly attend.

## **Actions We'll Take to Implement "Silent Tears" Findings**

### **Implement a "Chaplains for Child Protection Professionals" training program**

- Specially-trained chaplains are already available for law enforcement officers.
- DSS will work with the faith community to develop a "Chaplains for Child Protection Professionals" program for those who suffer "vicarious trauma."

### **Ensure that every county has at least 5 evidence-based child abuse prevention programs**

- The report set a goal of 5 programs per county within 5 years.
- DSS will work with CACs and MDTs to achieve this goal.

### **Help parents raise their voices so that child care facilities will have adequate policies and training**

- The report found that "[p]arents can play an important role in improving the mandated reporting system by insisting that the day cares, schools and churches their children attend have adequate child protection policies and that the workers at these institutions are adequately trained to recognize instances of abuse."
- DSS will provide training to day care, schools and churches regarding adequate child protection policies and the mandated reporting system.

### **Direct local DSS officials to work with community faith leaders to expand the HALOS program**

- Charleston's HALOS (Helping and Lending Outreach Support) program operates in 3 counties.
- HALOS links local DSS offices to churches so that children and families can receive the financial or other resources that address their otherwise-unmet needs.
- The report recommends "that ministerial and other associations of faith leaders in every county in South Carolina form a working group to consider the feasibility of a HALOS program in their communities." DSS would be pleased to participate in each county.

### **Help faith leaders receive training on child abuse and reporting obligations**

- The report recommends that MDTs ensure reach faith leaders with this training.
- Guardian ad Litem and DSS will support that outreach and will augment that training, if necessary.

### **Increase community awareness of mandated reporter training**

- The report suggests that "all MDT agencies list available training on their websites, social media pages and otherwise actively promote training opportunities."
- DSS will post the available mandatory reporter trainings on its websites and will augment, if necessary.

### **Adopt a "2-plus-10" plan**

- The report suggests that the state "adopt as its goal a minimum of two hours of in-person training each year for mandated reporters...supplemented with an additional ten hours of training that mandated reporters can access 24/7 online but must complete every three years." The online courses could be managed by the Children's Law Center or another statewide entity.
- Guardian ad Litem and DSS would provide curricula and other augmented training, as needed.

### **Create a Task Force by Executive Order, to determine how we can resolve child abuse cases more swiftly**

- The report calls for a bipartisan "commission of legislators, court administrators, appellate and trial judges, solicitors specializing in child abuse cases, defense attorneys, medical and mental health professionals and, most importantly, child abuse survivors or their families impacted by lengthy court delays," tasked to develop concrete recommendations to resolve CSA (child sexual assault) cases within six months of an arrest or filing of charges."