February 1, 2018

The Honorable Jefferson Sessions III
Attorney General of the United States
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

As organizations invested in preventing violence and crime and helping children be safe, we are writing to let you know of our strong support for the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Children Exposed to Violence (CEV) initiative.

CEV is preventing crime and violence by identifying and addressing the needs of children who are experiencing or witnessing violence, abuse and other adverse childhood experiences, and training the adults who encounter these children to recognize them and respond. We appreciate that this bipartisan initiative was included in President Trump’s FY18 budget and then supported as an amendment in the full Senate Appropriations Committee markup.

Comprehensive research begun in 2008 by the DOJ and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed the nation that 60 percent of American children have been exposed to violence or abuse. Almost half of the children surveyed (46.3 percent) had been assaulted in the previous year, and more than one in ten had been injured in the assault. As you may know, it was this national research and the desire to help children being harmed that prompted the creation of the CEV initiative.

Children exposed to violence and trauma, especially if it is left unaddressed through adolescence and early adulthood, are at much greater risk for becoming victims of crime and interacting with the criminal justice system. They also are more likely to have health and mental health problems, including opioid addiction and other substance abuse disorders, drop out of school, and struggle to be economically independent.

This initiative continues to use the research to help communities reduce crime and violence against children. Recently it has:

- Produced a new training kit for police and other law enforcement agencies;
- Raised public awareness about the prevalence and impact of award-winning campaign, Changing Minds. This campaign and training program makes exposure to violence understandable and gives practical help to “frontline adults” who work with children, such as law enforcement officers, teachers, coaches, and health care providers, along with parents. It is modeled on the anti-domestic violence campaign, There’s No Excuse, and similarly successful campaigns such as the efforts of Autism Speaks.
• The CEV initiative is also providing ongoing training and technical assistance to three states made up of high-level, child-serving state agency administrators in the effort to develop further collaboration across their systems to better serve youth exposed to violence. The states are building on the lessons of earlier state, community, and tribal demonstration sites that were funded from 2011-2016. This reflects the growing state interest in preventing crime and violence by helping children early, with nearly 20 diverse states introducing bills in 2017 to address children’s exposure to violence, such as Alaska, Montana, and Virginia.

We respectfully request that you again support the Children Exposed to Violence Initiative in the U.S. Department of Justice’s Fiscal Year 2019 request.

Thank you for your consideration of this recommendation, and please feel free to contact Kiersten Stewart at Futures Without Violence, 202-595-7383, with any questions.

Sincerely,

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Futures Without Violence

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President and CEO
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