

Exhibit No. 5Date 3-20-07*Madam*

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Betty Hidalgo. I am a member of the board of Montana's Children's Trust Fund Board and Board Chair at the present time. I represent the board and myself. Professionally I am a Registered Nurse with over forty years of Maternal Child Health experience.

In American history, we can find skirmishes against the social ill of child abuse but, to a great extent, we have abandoned children to the mercy of those who harm them. In 1865 the society to Prevent Cruelty to Animals was founded but it wasn't until 1874 that the Society to Prevent Cruelty to children was founded. In the 1930's with the passage of the Social Security Act the federal government recognized an interest in protecting children from abuse. In 1962 physicians' recognized that Battered Child Syndrome as an independent diagnosis.

Over the past several decades Congress has passed significant pieces of legislation that supported the states duty and power to act on behalf of children. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act [CAPTA] is one of the key pieces of legislation that guides child protection. The Act in its inception, was signed into law in the 1974 and was reauthorized in 1978, 1984, 1988, 1992 and 1996. With each reauthorization, amendments have been made to CAPTA that have expanded and refined the scope of the law. The Act was more recently reauthorized on June 25, 2003 by the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003 Public Law 108-36. Following the passage of the 1984 reauthorization, Montana's legislature like most states, passed legislation in 1985 that created the Children's Trust Fund Program. Upon passage of the states legislation Montana became eligible for federal funding that helps to support the trust fund activities. The trust's fund purpose is to support primary and secondary preventions programs that are community based grants designed to reduce and eliminate the incidence of child abuse.

States have placed a one time one million allotment to their Children's Trust Fund Endowment. The trust fund board would use the interest earnings from the endowment to fund additional monies back to the communities on an ongoing basis. You have heard the averages of \$178,000.00 which is annually received Montana's population of children. During the current funding cycle the board funded fourteen projects. The average grant is \$15,000.00 ranging to \$30,000.00 for Resource Centers. Montanans are resourceful in their communities to improve the lives of their children and their families. As of us certainly are aware that this is a small amount of investment in our children and their families in what we were able to provide in fourteen of our communities. As you also have heard federal requirement for programs of best practices and outcome measures are now being required of the grant as well as this should be in being fiscally responsible in any program.

From my understanding each one of you have a Montana Kids Count 2006 data book. What I want to call your attention is, in each one of your counties under safety is the reports of child abuse and neglect. Many children suspected of being abused are not reported into the system. The child protection community lacks a unified voice in communicating the needs of maltreated children, these victims often receive an

inadequate share of our country's and communities financial resources. Nationwide we spend one hundred twenty billion dollars per year dealing with the aftermath of abuse and this is without prosecution costs. Early prevention makes a difference.

The trust fund board has a seven member, volunteer board appointed by the Governor for three year terms. The board meets on a quarterly basis and is actively involved in selecting and funding family resource centers, local innovative community-based programs that provide family support and prevention services. Families can not be mandated in the Children's Trust Programs. All services provided by these dollars must be voluntary. The board and its program is administratively attached to the Dept. of Public Health and Human Services, Child and Family Services Division. The board is autonomous in that it makes all decisions regarding program policies and procedures, program design and financial management. Montana's Children's Trust Fund holds an annual grantee meeting since it inception..

As Montana continues to move forward with other states in "a call to end child abuse in the United States"—Victor Vieth states "every university must teach students entering professions where they will be mandated reporters the skills necessary to perform the task." We must increase public awareness and activities with a high percentage in normalizing parenting classes that are known to have benchmarks of best practice.

I taught prenatal classes for a number of years and I recall that it was not a social norm to attend classes in preparation for the birth of your child. I recall the advent of fathers in the delivery room and what a problem that would cause—it was and is the right position to take in assisting with bonding and support of families. Both of these educational offerings are now socially acceptable. Because child abuse is so often cyclical, we pass down the consequences of this evil to generation upon generation. Child protection investigators and police will state abuse has been rampant in families dating back to victims grandfather or even great grandfather. What if, we ended child abuse once and for all—would not a thousand generations be blessed. Stated differently families give our destiny its first momentum. I look forward to the day and I know I will see this in my lifetime where parenting classes with best practices will be the social norm. In my mother's family there were eight children and in my father's family there were five children. They all had the support of the extended family. This does not happen today in most families. Most of us parent our children the way we were parented, some things we do the same, some ways we do a little worse and some ways we do a little better. Children are our future, we need to place our children and their families first, our future depends on this and when you make the right decision things go right. Do not leave our children to stand alone, we are the voice of those who cannot speak for themselves. We cannot fix societies mistakes on the backs of children.

In the House it was President's Day when we presented this bill and I thought I would end the game here in the Senate with a couple of quotes from two Presidents. Herbert Hoover once observed—"of the United States could have but one generation properly born, trained, educated and healthy children, a thousand problems of government would vanish overnight—it is not the delinquent child that is at the bar of judgement, but

society itself. President Lincoln states "determine that the thing can be done and it will be done." I am echoing the voices of many leaders we can reduce child maltreatment with supporting primary prevention. Who, among you, are the keepers to step forward and work tirelessly to keep the message alive? I hope you will support and pass House Bill 608. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Betty Hidalgo
902 Hauser Blvd.
Helena, Montana 59601
Home 442-2908