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**David Sanders, Chairman**  
Commission to End Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities

Dear Chairman Sanders,

It has been an honor to serve under your leadership on the Commission as we learned from experts across the country about needed actions to protect America's children from fatalities due to abuse and neglect. While each of the Commissioners brought different experiences and perspectives to this work, I believe we shared a common belief that the life, health, and spirit of every child in our country matters, and that the need to make drastic changes to the way we approach child protection is urgent.

My commitment to the children impacted by this Commission's findings and recommendations is both professional and personal. I am one of the hundreds of thousands of children for whom CPS intervened due to abuse and neglect. Like so many children, I was placed in foster care as removal was the only intervention available to those charged with ensuring my safety. While I am deeply grateful that this intervention kept me alive, I left foster care with the permanent scars of growing up under the care of an overburdened, underfunded system that was never able to provide the nurturing parenting I desperately needed. Our child protective system was unable to provide any resources to help my parents, and they never received the interventions that might have assisted them to become healthy.

I believe I may have learned the most about the ways that our child protective system needs reform from my current experience as a mother. Despite the incredible supports I received that created stability in my adult life, I have faced the challenge of parenting without a roadmap and without resolution of my own early trauma and loss. I also have seen how making good decisions for my children requires me to be constantly learning, assessing the results of my efforts, prioritizing and harnessing every available resource, technology, and tool to ensure my children have happy and healthy childhoods. Over the course of the commission, as I learned the heartbreaking stories of children we have failed, I could not help but be dismayed by the contrast of the very

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different approach we have taken with our child protective efforts. I believe we have a moral, ethical and legal obligation to reform our efforts to protect children by investing in learning how to provide supports and interventions that are effective and meaningful, developing and using innovation, and partnering to provide a real support net to children and families.

I strongly support the recommendations in this report that will help us achieve this goal of a child protection safety net that incorporates the rigorous research, data collection and sharing, multi-disciplinary approach, and concrete supports to children and families that we are currently capable of providing. We need the knowledge, skills, resources and leadership of agencies that have not previously taken ownership of the welfare of vulnerable children and families. We must make efforts to apply what we are learning through safety science to CPS agencies chronically plagued with leadership, management, workforce and accountability troubles. We must assess our ability to creatively harness technology and data to assist these children and families. We need to invest in rigorous research to develop a knowledge base about the services, supports, and interventions that support families in healing and health. We must offer vulnerable families who are devastated by the impacts of mental illness, substance abuse and poverty concrete resources such as immediate access to mental health and substance abuse treatment that allows parents and children to remain unified, subsidized high quality childcare, and in home supports in lieu of removal whenever possible. And, we must engage and listen to the voices of families and youth about what is working, what is needed, and what is not helpful.

It is a national tragedy and public health crisis when thousands of children are deprived of a childhood and the chance to experience the joys and milestones of life. With my fellow Commissioners, I strongly believe we can do better: as individuals, as communities, as states and as a nation. I hope this report assists in establishing a vision and pathway to that goal. Vulnerable children are depending on our nation's collective assurances that we will take every necessary action to ensure their well-being.

Sincerely,

*Jennifer Rodriguez*

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