

Solutions for addressing child abuse

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Ilana Sherer thoughtfully examined her decision as a pediatrician to report abuse of a teenager to Child Protective Services [[Health & Science](#), Aug. 16]. Doctors frequently do not call child protective services agencies when they suspect abuse because they do not trust the agencies to respond effectively, she explained. Their distrust is not misplaced.

[CPS involvement did not improve long-run outcomes, a 2010 study found](#). Such involvement sometimes harms children by taking them from their families unnecessarily — which, in my office’s experience, happens more than 100 times each year in the District. These removals traumatize children and devastate families.

There are solutions, however, including one the District is beginning this month: a pilot “differential response” program — triaging less severe CPS hotline calls and providing services immediately to families, rather than launching adversarial and punitive investigations. The District’s reforms must go further to rebuild trust in our child welfare system. Professionals and parents alike need to have confidence that the government will work with families to solve problems rather than take punitive action and remove children unnecessarily.

Mayor Vincent C. Gray (D) should articulate this vision, and agency directors should redirect their limited funds to implement it with front-line services.

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