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BAUCUS BILL TO PROTECT KIDS FROM ABUSE AND NEGLECT SIGNED INTO LAW

<u>"Protect Our Kids Act" Will Organize New Task Force to Provide Policy Recommendations</u> <u>to Prevent Child Abuse</u>

Washington, DC – Legislation authored by Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) to develop a national strategy for reducing child abuse was signed into law today. The Protect Our Kids Act will create a special task force to study and evaluate federal, state and private child welfare systems and provide policy recommendations to prevent child maltreatment, abuse and neglect. Congress passed the legislation earlier this month.

"I am proud that we were able to come together to get this done for America's children. They are the future of this country and we must continue to take every action possible to protect them from harm," Senator Baucus said. "This task force is the first step in finding meaningful solutions to eliminate child abuse and neglect and make sure no child suffers in silence. I plan to work with child welfare leaders from Montana and here in Congress to find the experts and advocates who will immediately bring something to the table and make this task force strong and effective."

The task force will be comprised of 12-15 welfare administrators, child welfare workers, law enforcement officers and other experts in the field of child abuse prevention. Upon completion of its evaluation of the nation's child welfare systems, the task force will report its findings to the president and Congress.

More than six million children are abused or neglected in America every year, most of whom are younger than four years old, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In fiscal year 2011, 1,545 children in the United States were reported to have died from abuse and neglect, and many experts believe that the actual number may be significantly higher.

According to Child Protection Services data, Montana reported zero fatalities from child abuse and neglect last year, but gaps in data between agencies and in the reporting mean the actual number could be higher.

"We need better coordination and data sharing between Child Protection Services and other agencies at every level," Senator Baucus said. "It is my hope that this task force will provide recommendations to overcome these challenges. No child should live in fear of abuse or neglect. Every child deserves to live a healthy, productive life."