Every Child Matters’ recent report documents that 10,440 children in the U.S. died from abuse and neglect from 2001 to 2007 – a rate much higher than democracies such as Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom. The report indicates that three-quarters of the children were under the age of four. Similarly, research by the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) indicates that children ages three and younger are the most frequent victims of child fatalities.

An estimated 1,760 child fatalities were reported in 2007, a 35 percent increase since 2001. This translates to a rate of 2.35 children per 100,000 children in the general population, according to the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

The preventable deaths of at least 10,000 children in a seven-year period demand the attention of policy makers and elected officials at all levels, according to Michael Petit, President of Every Child Matters. Senator Robert Casey and Representative Patrick Kennedy joined several national child advocacy organizations for a rally on Capitol Hill to help raise awareness of child abuse and neglect deaths. The event kicked off Every Child Matters Education Fund’s summit, marking the 100th anniversary of the first-ever White House summit on children’s issues.

Prosecutors and allied professionals should be aware that recommendations for Congress, the Administration, state governments, and child advocates nationwide may include:

- a national strategy to reduce maltreatment deaths, including evidence-based public health and social services;
- increased federal spending to protect all children at imminent risk of harm;
- a model protocol for assuring that civil and criminal legal proceedings are closely coordinated between child protection and law enforcement agencies;
- standard definitions, methodologies, and reporting requirements to improve data collection related to maltreatment deaths;
- better training and reduced caseloads for child protection workers and other frontline personnel to ensure that at-risk children receive appropriate attention;
- modification of confidentiality laws to allow policy makers, the press, and the public to better understand protection policies and practices; and
- public education campaigns to encourage reporting of child abuse and neglect, and to enlist communities in the protection of children.

“Child fatality”, as defined by NCANDS, is the death of a child caused by an injury resulting from abuse or neglect, or where abuse or neglect was a contributing factor. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACF) suggests that fatal child abuse may involve repeated abuse over a period of time, or it may involve a single, impulsive incident. ACF defines fatal neglect as a child’s death resulting from a caregiver’s failure to act, not from anything the caregiver does.
While child abuse and neglect deaths total approximately five per day in the U.S., several studies have concluded there is significant undercounting of maltreatment deaths. Experts believe the actual number of child fatalities may be as much as 50 percent higher than 10,440. This variation may be due to inconsistent data collection methodologies, record-keeping, and definitions of abuse and neglect among the states.

For example, states generally have three main types of child neglect statutes: (1) termination of parent child relationship due to neglect, (2) mandatory reporting of child neglect, and (3) criminal liability for child neglect. Every state does not have each type of statute, nor does every state use the term neglect to define a situation where a parent does not provide basic means of support such as food and shelter for a child. See http://www.ndaa.org/pdf/ncpca_statutes_childneglect_ala_mis_oct09.pdf for a compilation of civil and criminal child neglect state statutes.

The variation among the actual and reported number of child fatalities may also be affected by who determines the cause of death. The report suggests that the coordination of data collection may produce more accurate and consistent estimates. Such reporting sources may include law enforcement, child welfare agencies, health departments, vital statistics departments, medical examiners' offices, and fatality review teams.

For hard copies of *We Can Do Better: Child Abuse and Neglect Deaths in America*, please contact dtiley@everychildmatters.org.