

HAVING KIDS™

Child-first Advocacy

HavingKids.org

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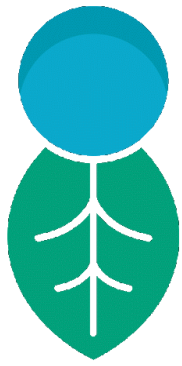
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May 15, 2018

Governor Holcomb,

[Having Kids](http://HavingKids.org) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to [reforming family planning](#) by replacing parent-centered family planning models with the human rights-based and child-first [Fair Start model](#). We are writing to you out of concern for current and future child abuse/neglect victims in the State of Indiana.

In mid-April 2018, the Department of Child Service, in response to multiple anonymous phone calls, removed four children from a home in Greenfield, Indiana occupied by Christopher Smith



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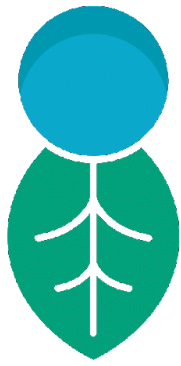
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and Chantelle Oliver. According to court records, Smith allegedly engaged in regular physical and verbal abuse of the children including punching and slapping them, grabbed the children by the hair, and smacking them in the face. Per DCS records, the children were, at first, afraid to talk to investigators, fearing for their own safety. One child stated that Smith once pushed her head into a wall, causing her nose to bleed. Smith was arrested and charged with multiple counts, including three felony counts of domestic battery on a person less than 14 years old. He has denied harming any of the children.

As Smith is currently being held without bail waiting further court proceedings, it is, of course, extremely important that these children finally receive the care and attention that they deserve. It is critical, though, that, if the allegations of abuse are proven to be true, that these children not be put back in the hands of their abuser in the near future. Having Kids wants more for the children of Indiana than the state's after-the-fact reaction to such horrible abuse, however, and we're convinced that you feel the same way. After all, reacting after a child has already been made to suffer means that the child will spend his or her lifetime recovering from this trauma. From a purely economic point of view, the state will spend a considerable amount of resources to attempt to reverse these negative effects.[1]

What happened to these children in Smith's case stems from a larger problem of poor family planning and parenting; a problem that begins with a paradigm in which the decision to have a child is focused on what parents want in the short term rather than what each child needs in the long term. Under that paradigm, it's unsurprising that long-term abuse and neglect cases like this – and far worse – make headlines in Indiana every week.[2][3]

In 2016 alone, there were 28,430 victims of abuse or neglect in Indiana, an increase of 7.7% from 2015.[4] Even more alarming, the number of fatalities as a result of child abuse and neglect more than *doubled* in Indiana in 2016 to 70 deaths (from 34 in 2015), making Indiana have the unfortunate distinction as the state with the highest percentage of increases in child-abuse-related deaths in the country.[5] Clearly, this is a systemic problem that is only growing in severity, particularly in light of our country's opioid epidemic, which is particularly straining Indiana's already overburdened foster care system.[6][7] The current model – which makes having and raising kids the exclusive and hidden-from-view business of the parents –



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ignores every child's right to a minimum standard of wellbeing not only at birth, but throughout childhood. The parent-centered family planning and parenting paradigm is a violation of the rights of children to be protected.

Having Kids urges the State of Indiana, through its appropriate agents, to consider seeking an order in the Hancock County criminal case against Smith, in the event of conviction and probation, to prevent Smith from having children for a limited time period as a condition of his probation. The details of such an approach can be found at <https://havingkids.org/solution-fair-start-orders/>. Smith's alleged conduct, if proved true, has demonstrated a clear unfitness to parent at this time and the state should not be setting him up for further failure. It should instead take the necessary steps for rehabilitation (such as government-mandated counseling, parenting courses, etc.) The state would not consider putting the helpless boy back into a convicted abuser's care; the state should similarly consider the right of a child not to be born to a known abuser while the threat is clearly manifest.

Finally, we urge you, Governor Halcomb, and your administration to protect future children in Indiana by working with legislators on a law that explicitly authorizes courts, in specialized cases of egregious abuse, such as that of Smith, to issue orders preventing abusive and neglectful parents from having additional children for limited time periods. The State of Indiana can fulfill its obligations to future children by moving towards a human-rights based and child-first family planning model. Having Kids is available to assist in creating state policy and law that furthers this goal. Please contact us.

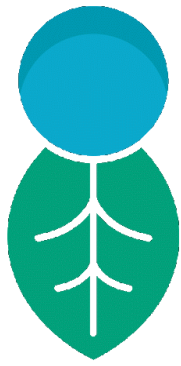
Sincerely,

Anne Green

Executive Director

Having Kids

Having Kids is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to reforming family planning by replacing parent-centered family planning models with the human rights-based and child-first Fair Start model.



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[1] Per a 2017 study, the economic cost to the public was \$400,000 for each victim of child abuse in the City of San Francisco in 2015. See *The Economics of Child Abuse*, a report by the San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center and the Haas School of Business at University of California, Berkeley, available at:

https://safeandsound.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/economicsofabuse_report_sfcapc1.pdf

[2]

http://www.heraldbulletin.com/news/anderson-police-arrest-jennifer-harris-mother-of-harlan-haines/article_e43a8304-4d93-5e72-840b-a412f94c1fca.html

[3]

<https://www.abc57.com/news/four-facing-charges-after-child-hospitalized-with-life-threatening-injuries>

[4] Per statistics compiled by the Children's Welfare League of America.

<https://www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Indiana.pdf>. This figure is not even the full picture as there were more 112,000 reports of child abuse and neglect referred to for investigation in Indiana in 2016.

[5] <https://indianapublicmedia.org/news/data-child-abuse-deaths-indiana-doubled-year-139763/>

[6]

<https://www.npr.org/2017/12/23/573021632/the-foster-care-system-is-flooded-with-children-of-the-opioid-epidemic>

[7]

http://www.kpcnews.com/opinions/other_columnists/kpcnews/article_66d804ba-fd6d-554d-9cb3-c1c9a26a7538.html