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Children First: National Model for the Vertical Prosecution of Cases Involving Murdered and Physically Abused Children

David M. Williams

SUMMARY. Investigations and prosecutions involving murdered and physically abused children are among the most serious and most complex faced by law enforcement professionals. These cases are complicated on legal, factual, medical, and scientific levels. Oftentimes, the evidence against the suspected perpetrator is solely circumstantial. Many of the problems inherent in these investigations can be overcome by prioritizing these cases. The local prosecutor's office can take the

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lead in ensuring justice by direct participation in the investigative phase and by ensuring continuity in the prosecution. In this article, I outline a model to ensure that this happens. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS. Prosecutor, child murder, child physical abuse, team

Too often, there is no one to speak for abused children who, because of their physical or developmental age, cannot advocate for themselves. Child maltreatment statistics are staggering. Each year an estimated one million violent crimes involving child victims are reported to the police; another 1.1 million cases of child abuse are substantiated by child protection agencies (Kilpatrick & Saunders, 1997). Of the 22.3 million adolescents aged 12 to 17, approximately 3.9 million reported having been victims of a serious physical assault. Society often has difficulty believing that those responsible for the health and safety of children, especially parents, are capable of such brutality (North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute, 2000). Statistics prove otherwise. Every year, nearly 1,200 children and youth are murdered by caretakers–most of the victims are 5 years old or younger (U.S. Department of Justice, 1994). In fact, it is more likely that a female will be murdered before the age of one than at any other time in her life (Scarnberg, 2002). Very few criminal acts are more horrible than the murder of infants. Very few criminal acts are also more difficult to prove.

Justice for murdered and abused children can be scarce. Resources are scant. Budgets have been slashed; programs have been combined; emphasis has shifted to contemporary "hot button" topics (e.g., homeland security and financial identity theft). Witnesses are few. Often, the murderer is the sole witness to the crime. These cases are further complicated on legal, factual, and interpersonal levels because the victim and the offender often share a familial relationship (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 1999). Family members, who may be witnesses to prior incidents or are knowledgeable regarding the family's social history, are usually reluctant to get involved with law enforcement or unwilling to "betray" the family. Corroborating physical evidence is often lacking. Frequently, the crime scene is not quickly identified or adequately preserved, resulting in the loss (or potential contamination) of physical

evidence. The expert opinion as to manner or cause of death is often subjective, relying on extrinsic evidence and rarely establishing the identity (or intent) of the perpetrator(s). As a result, investigations languish and prosecutions are hampered. And if cases make it in front of a jury, prosecutors face the daunting task of persuading judges and jurors that loving and otherwise law-abiding caregivers beat, shake, and starve their children to death (North Carolina Children's Advocacy Institute, 2000).

All too often, the justice system is also bogged down in political and bureaucratic quagmires. Turf battles (e.g., responsibilities, control) between law enforcement agencies often interfere with the efficient and successful investigation of these cases (Vieth, 1998). Overcoming all these obstacles and conflicts is paramount in finding a more efficient and effective path to the truth. Lines of communication between the evidence gatherers and the evidence interpreters must be opened and maintained. It is equally important to build trust and respect among prosecutors, investigators, doctors, and social workers, recognizing the importance of each other's contributions. Because prosecution is the culmination of a successful investigation, it is incumbent upon the prosecutor to provide this forum and develop this coordination. Yet many prosecutorial models lack a unified approach to prosecution. Most prosecuting offices employ a traditional approach that can be described as assembly-line justice: one prosecutor handles a case at the charging stage; a second prosecutor procures the indictment; and a third prosecutor is assigned as the trial attorney. This revolving door of prosecutors, although effective for most of the caseload, is ineffective in handling these complicated cases. Complex cases demand continuity, prioritization, and specialization. Vertical prosecution can meet these demands.

"Vertical prosecution" means a unified approach to a case–both in philosophy and in personnel. Oftentimes, the same prosecutor handles the case throughout the legal process (San Diego Regional Child Victim-Witness Task Force, 1991). Vertical prosecution is not a new concept. This procedure is already in use across the country to handle a variety of complex criminal cases that include murders, sexual assaults, and gang crimes. In contrast to roles in traditional prosecution models (where the prosecutor becomes involved at or after the charging decision), vertical prosecutors become active in a case at its inception. A vertical prosecutor who is trained and experienced in the specific subject matter can identify problems, coordinate efforts, and facilitate interaction between various agencies throughout the pendancy of the case.

Prosecutors, doctors, investigators, social workers, educators, and the community must give greater priority to child abuse cases. A national survey of prosecutors found that of all cases, child abuse and adult sexual assault required the most time and resources (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). In many prosecuting offices, adult sexual assault cases have received priority because dedicated units have been created for vertical prosecution, but the murders of children have not been specifically addressed in this fashion. This can be accomplished by creating a specialized unit of prosecutors: the Child Victim Unit (CVU).

In the remainder of this article, I outline the goals and mission of the CVU. Clearly defining the CVU's responsibilities and case acceptance policy will ensure the integrity of the CVU's focus and specialization. In addition to traditional prosecutorial functions, the prosecutors assigned to the CVU are charged with the duty of building relationships among the victims, witnesses, and others (e.g., investigators, doctors, nurses, teachers, clergy, social workers, psychologists) involved in the protection of our children. The prosecutors in the CVU are managers of a system that coordinates the disciplines and facilitates communication in a combined effort to protect our children, educate the community, and reduce the incidents of physical abuse against our youth (Vieth, this volume).

CHANGING THE ROLE OF THE PROSECUTOR

The Requirements of the Prosecutor and the Prosecutorial Team

To increase the likelihood of success in these difficult cases, prosecuting agencies must develop specially trained prosecutors specifically for these cases (Delany-Shabazz & Vieth, 2001). They should be well versed in the technical legal issues and trained to understand complicated psychological and medical issues. They must develop specialized interpersonal skills to handle the intricate familial relationships involved in these cases, as well as be able to work with child witnesses.

The prosecutor's training in the handling of child victim cases should include developing a specialized body of legal knowledge. Child victim cases require more extensive knowledge of certain areas of the law to ensure effective prosecution. First, child victim cases often require expert testimony and knowledge of the corresponding law. Second, these cases utilize specialized evidentiary law such as the hearsay exceptions for the outcries of child victims, the limited use of prior consistent statements, and

the introduction into evidence of statements made to medical personnel in the course of treatment. Third, these cases often deal with the difficult interplay between the charge of murder and lesser-included offenses, such as involuntary manslaughter–issues that take considerable resources to defeat.

In the course of the investigation, once the cause of death is ascertained and the identity of the alleged perpetrator is established, the intent of the offender must be determined to decide whether or not criminal charges are warranted. Determining the appropriate charge(s) within existing statutes can be difficult. The key issue is whether the requisite mental state that is required to establish criminal culpability can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. A defendant's mental state at the time a criminal act was committed is often difficult to prove, especially in child maltreatment or fatality cases (Vieth, this volume). Common defenses that eliminate or reduce criminal intent include accident, natural causes, emotional or mental illness, lack of knowledge that the behavior in question would be harmful or dangerous, or that someone else was responsible. The prosecutor must analyze the totality of the circumstances and facts surrounding a particular case. This includes determining the credibility of witnesses and offender, the evaluation of any corroborating physical or circumstantial evidence, and the consideration of expert opinion. Child victim cases also require a specialized body of medical and psychological knowledge. Violent child abuse cases require an understanding of the physical and the psychological development of children. The medical testimony in these cases is crucial to the success of the prosecution. Medical testimony may be the only direct evidence presented by the prosecution. The need for specialized knowledge extends beyond the case-in-chief and involves battling defense-oriented expert testimony that attempts to explain, excuse, or justify a defendant's actions.

Prosecutors and members of the prosecution team assigned to handle cases involving child victims and witnesses should have more in-depth training in forensic interviewing, child development, identification of abuse-related injuries, emotional and psychological impact of abuse, as well as the legal issues related to child victims and witnesses (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). The specialized training should include a familiarity with the social service agencies that work with children. Prosecutors should also receive training on medical conditions that can be mistaken for signs of neglect or maltreatment. This training will help facilitate a better understanding of the medical and social service community in general, which, in turn, should make it easier to incorporate them into the prosecution.

Child maltreatment cases are often made more complex due to the fact that the victims or other children are necessary witnesses. Prosecutors should be experienced and have specialized training in interviewing and preparing children (who may be inarticulate and/or reluctant) for court (American Prosecutors Research Institute, 2003). The developmental stages and needs of child victims and witnesses must be recognized to ensure they are treated with sensitivity throughout the investigative and trial process (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). As detailed in the article by Perona, Bottoms, and Sorenson (this volume), prosecutors must speak to the children in their language and make them comfortable in court. To increase their comfort level, tours and mock trials could be staged (McAuliff & Kovera, 2002). These child-sensitive techniques will help ensure that child witnesses are protected from being further traumatized by the court system and that their testimony has maximum impact. That is, children can be harmed not only as a result of maltreatment but also from systematically insensitive procedures used to address reported maltreatment, such as a particularly insensitive interview process (Kolbo & Strong, 1997). They need to be treated with compassion and professionalism by criminal justice personnel from the first response to the crime throughout the prosecution process (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999).

Early and continued involvement by the prosecutor is important during the interviews of witnesses. There is extensive research on the interviewing of child witnesses that give investigators guidance as to legally and scientifically sound interviewing techniques (Perona, Bottoms, & Sorenson, this volume). Protocol should be followed to gather as much accurate information as is possible (Sternberg, Lamb, Orbach, Esplin, & Mitchell, 2001). Inappropriate interview techniques can compromise and contaminate children's testimony (Bruck, 1999). The prosecutors and investigators need to discuss and agree upon the manner in which the interviews are to be conducted and the method by which they will be recorded (Cook County Task Force on Intake and Interviewing, 1996).

A trained investigator or prosecutor will also have specialized knowledge in the interrogation of a suspected child abuser. There are important factors to draw out in an interview, such as the disparity in size between the victim and the suspect, the instrument used to inflict the injury, past abuse and its frequency, history of relationship, and the stated "reason" for the abusive actions, all of which will be important when the case is in court.

The prosecutor who is involved early in a case will also have the opportunity to develop a legal strategy for the case and a plan for anticipat-

ing and meeting defenses from the outset of the case. The prosecutor can assist with preparing warrants or interviewing witnesses and ensure that the collection and preservation of evidence is conducted in a manner required by law, so that the evidence will be admissible at trial (Vieth, this volume). There should also be agreement concerning the collection, preservation, and scientific analysis of physical evidence. Special consideration should be given to the collection of evidence that may be later needed and submitted for scientific testing (American Prosecutor's Research Institute, 2003).

These delicate and complex cases need the continuity provided by the same prosecutor, investigator, and victim-witness specialist. Lack of continuity can adversely impact the presentation of the case. Revolving prosecutors may have an inadequate understanding of the history of the case or of the child's family dynamics. This incomplete perspective often results in shifting legal theories or inaccurate analysis. A less-experienced prosecutor who lacks an intimate knowledge of the case may incorrectly assess the case as a lesser offense, such as second-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter, or reckless homicide. Strategically, one prosecutor may feel a child witness (victim or non-victim) is competent to testify while another may feel the witness cannot testify and file hearsay exception motions. These differences in approach may unnecessarily split the focus of the prosecution, and in some cases, convey to the judge inaccurately that there are evidentiary problems with the case. Both scenarios inevitably diminish the chances of a conviction. Vertical prosecution has proven an effective tool in combating these (and related) problems.

The prosecutor should ensure that cases involving child victims and witnesses receive priority and are handled as expeditiously as possible, minimizing unnecessary delays. The combination of case complexity, expert testimony, technical legal issues, reluctant defense attorneys, and numerous pre-trial motions all contribute to delaying disposition of these cases. A child abuse homicide case may have as many as 30 to 40 witnesses in the prosecution's case alone: law enforcement, medical personnel, forensic scientists, civilian witnesses who are unfamiliar with the criminal process and court, family members and friends of the victim and defendant who are reluctant to testify and may need convincing of the importance of their testimony, and child witnesses who are afraid and inarticulate. The longer these cases are delayed, the greater the potential for an adverse and long-term psychological impact on the victims and their families. As these cases often involve familial relationships, there is a higher likelihood that, in time, pressure will be exerted on the victims and

their family members to change their testimony. Furthermore, children, like most other witnesses, testify more accurately when they testify closer in time to the offense (Perona, Bottoms, & Sorenson, this volume).

Expediting cases will also help minimize trauma to the child and the child's family, which is another goal prosecutors must strive for. Multiple, changing prosecutors threatens this goal. A change in prosecutors often breaks the lines of trust and communication with the witnesses and the family, factors that are understandably difficult to establish and often difficult to maintain in this type of victim-sensitive cases. Having multiple people deal with the children and their families over a long period of time will invariably result in a lack of trust in the justice system. Instead, the prosecutor must invest significant time with witnesses and victims to build trust and a strong relationship. The prosecutor should ensure that child victims and witnesses receive support services as they go through the criminal justice system. Failure to find prompt dispositions of child fatality cases may contribute to a poor outcome for the victim's family and the criminal justice system (North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute, 2000).

Finally, prosecutors are in the position to lead community efforts in re-affirming the value of our children. As advocates, prosecutors have the ability to prosecute offenders on a case-by-case basis. Their impact, however, can be far reaching. Prosecutors can effect changes in the development and application of laws by writing and lobbying for laws. New and improved laws could provide greater protection to children and allow prosecutors greater latitude in the use of evidence. Education efforts, both in prevention and in punishment, may reduce the incidence of child maltreatment. This, in turn, could affect societal perception of the important issues pertaining to physically abused and murdered children.

The Issues of Coordination with the Community and Other Agencies

The prosecutor should not impede the work of the other professionals involved in a case, but should actively participate in the coordination of efforts and the development of investigative and prosecutorial strategies. The process of gathering and preserving evidence, whether it is testimonial or physical, is crucial to the prosecutor's search for the truth and justice. Thus, the prosecutor should work with the police throughout the evidence gathering stage. The police can also rely on the prosecutor for legal research, arrest warrants, and search warrants. The prosecutor can then evaluate all the evidence to make decisions con-

cerning how best to build a strategy to prove the case at trial or decide that the evidence is not sufficient to pursue criminal charges. To protect the innocent and punish the guilty, it is essential that all case facts are properly evaluated.

There must be continuity from the investigation through prosecution to ensure that guilty offenders are held accountable their actions. Without a CVU, the prosecution of offenders may suffer from the enormity of the extended criminal justice system. That is, frequently, a variety of agencies such as the local police department, child welfare, guardian's office, and/or other family court personnel will be involved in these types of cases. At times, there is a lack of communication between these various agencies and/or disputes over child protection issues, which hamper the effective prosecution of some offenders. In some situations, this lack of continuity prevents the prosecution of the most culpable offenders based on ever-evolving, yet uncommunicated factual information. The CVU would create and facilitate multi-disciplinary cooperation between various agencies and would lead to a higher percentage of successful prosecutions. Efforts to ensure coordination and continuity in these cases will not only enhance the relationship between the prosecutor and witnesses but also will increase the rapport with investigators and service providers. This methodology would create a team atmosphere in which all the participants would join together as a team with a unified goal. As each is an integral component of the prosecution team, each member consequently has a vested interest in the success of the outcome. All of the members of the team have particular responsibilities to the investigation and to their agencies. All parties should work together equally with the common goal of pursuing justice in these cases. This will be facilitated via bi-monthly meetings in a round table format to discuss investigations and to assign tasks to each member to ensure accountability and communication. Members should be available and immediately accessible to each other, similar to the child advocacy center model. Unlike many advocacy center models, the CVU prosecutor follows the case from the child advocacy center, into the courtroom, and throughout the criminal justice process.

A child's death presents unique challenges to prosecutors, doctors, and law enforcement. The available evidence is much different than that of the murder of an adult. The bodies of murdered adults usually bear obvious signs of violence such as gunshot or stab wounds (Hanson, 2000). A child who is murdered, especially an infant, may not have outward signs of injury and those injuries that do appear may be missed if doctors and investigators are not trained to understand the signs of child

abuse (Parrish, 2002). In child homicide cases, emergency personnel often times have removed the victim or the defendant or other family members have "cleaned" the crime scene. Medical experts trained in forensics are crucial in reading these injuries in determining abuse. If misdiagnoses are made or suspicious injuries are not reported, the offender may not be held legally responsible for his or her actions. For example, it is very difficult to distinguish between SIDS and accidental or deliberate asphyxiation with a soft object (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001). However, when using a multi-disciplinary approach that takes into account the case history of the child and family, it is easier to make a more accurate determination regarding the injuries and the circumstances surrounding them (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001).

This expertise of prosecutors, investigators, and medical specialists goes beyond just the courtroom but extends into educating the public and medical employees to be aware of child abuse and develop proper techniques to ensure punishment of abusers. This includes training medical professionals to recognize the signs and injuries often associated with child abuse, how to treat these injuries, and how to document these injuries, which includes photographs. The medical community is an integral part of the prosecution team and is of crucial importance. Often times, many of these cases would go unreported if not for hospital employees, ambulance drivers, emergency medical technicians, social workers, nurses, and protective services. The expert testimony from emergency room doctors, treating physicians, forensic pediatrics, medical examiners, and other expert doctors in areas from burns to bone fractures is often the critical factor in proving the case. Early recognition, treatment, and documentation of children's injuries can save their lives.

In summary, prosecuting agencies must work hard to establish and maintain a procedural infrastructure in which prosecutors, the police, child welfare workers, doctors, medical examiners, and others involved in the investigation and the prosecution of child homicides work as a team. Working together, the prosecutor and the multidisciplinary team can evaluate the evidence, search for the truth, and find justice. The team can successfully fulfill the mission of protecting the innocent and punishing the guilty by understanding, collecting, and preserving evidence so that it can be analyzed by experts and used in the prosecution.

ESTABLISHING AN INVESTIGATIVE PROTOCOL

How, in practice, can a community establish its own CVU? The first step is establishing a protocol that specifies the role of all involved agencies. The protocol should be developed with the input of all the multidisciplinary professionals and should establish procedures and delineate responsibilities of all parties (Vieth, 1998). An initial meeting of all the parties should establish the advantages and disadvantages of forming a multidisciplinary team and set forth what each party can contribute (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). The next meeting would focus on a mission statement that should set out the philosophical direction of the team, such as the one provided below. After this has been discussed, the team should then create a protocol, which is a working document that clearly delineates each team member's responsibilities, as well as establishes the structure and processes of the team (e.g., meetings, notifications, decision making). Uniform intake and procedural guidelines should be developed to ensure the integrity of each investigation and to ensure communication between agencies. The protocol should set forth conflict resolution procedures to minimize interagency disputes (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000).

Child advocacy centers are a great tool to be implemented with the Child Victim Unit, but the CVU is prosecutorial driven. The mission of the CVU is to investigate and prosecute these cases using a multi-disciplinary approach combined with vertical prosecution.

An example of a protocol is given next.

PROPOSED PROTOCOL FOR SPECIALIZED UNIT: MURDER AND PHYSICAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 13

Mission Statement

This Unit (herein referred to as the "Child Victim Unit" or "CVU") will strive to provide the most effective and efficient prosecution of offenders who intentionally inflict serious injuries upon children entrusted to their care. The Child Victim Unit will prosecute these offenders to the fullest extent under the law, while attempting to make the criminal justice system less traumatic and impersonal to the victims and their families who have suffered at the hands of these offenders.

Goals of the Child Victim Unit

The Child Victim Unit is designed to accomplish its mission by:

- Establishing and maintaining a multidisciplinary team approach by creating a cohesive infrastructure within the prosecutor's office and between related law enforcement and social service agencies to ensure that cases do not get lost in the system, that the innocent do not get punished, and that the guilty do not escape prosecution.
- Coordinating prosecution efforts and liaisons with child abuse teams at advocacy centers, local hospitals, and social service agencies.
- Establishing the best possible rapport with child victims and their families.
- Providing greater continuity for cases throughout the legal process. This would be accomplished through vertical prosecution: having the same prosecutor handle the case from overseeing the investigation through sentencing.
- Prosecuting cases as expeditiously as possible.
- Educating the community, child advocacy groups, and law enforcement agencies on criminal prosecution of child abuse.
- Proposing and lobbying for legislation to strengthen the prosecution of child abuse.
- Becoming national leaders and a resource center in the area of child abuse prosecutions.

Case Acceptance Policy

The criteria for the cases handled by the Child Victim Unit would be very specific. This would allow for the best allocation of limited prosecutorial resources to ensure the most efficient and effective prosecutions.

1. *The Victim:* The unit would handle only cases involving victims of a certain age. This would provide the unit with a focus for those victims who are in the greatest need of the specialization provided by the unit. The age requirement should be directed by the law of the jurisdiction. In the State of Illinois, for example, the statues set the age of 13 years or less as an element of particular crimes such as aggravated battery of a child. Thus, a CVU in Illinois would handle cases involving children 13 years of age or younger.

2. *The Crime:* The unit would prosecute only crimes involving physical abuse or gross maltreatment of a child. These offenses would include and would be specifically limited to the following:

    a. Murder
    b. Attempted Murder
    c. Aggravated Battery to a Child
    d. Heinous Battery
    e. Child Endangerment
    f. Long Term Abuse of a Dependent

3. *The Offender:* The unit would focus on cases in which the child was the target of intentional physical abuse and/or gross maltreatment by an individual who:

    a. Is an adult under the laws of the jurisdiction
    b. Has a relationship with the child in which the offender was responsible for the care or custody of the child, including but not limited to:
        i. Family member, such as natural father, mother, sibling, stepparent, etc.
        ii. Caretaker, including paramour, baby-sitter, camp leader, coach or other child care personnel.

4. Focusing the CVU on these types of cases would allow the resources of the Unit to be maximized toward the cases that are the most serious and, consequently, the most in need of additional time and attention.

Structure of the Proposed Unit

The CVU would handle cases currently assigned to prosecutors in regular felony trial courts. The proposed CVU could work within the normal felony trial division or be a part of a special prosecutions division.

Staffing. Initially, the Child Victim Unit is envisioned as being staffed by experienced prosecutors who would be primarily responsible for trying all of the cases. At some point, their work could be supplemented with less experienced prosecutors who could work in the CVU for a designated period of time as part of a rotation through the juvenile court system. This would allow young prosecutors exposure to the fel-

ony court system while allowing the trial prosecutors an opportunity to focus on preparing their cases for trial.

Additional Services. The CVU would be aided by internal support from the prosecutor's office internal investigative and victim support units. Designated victim/witness personnel and designated investigators, specially trained, would facilitate the progress of these cases through the legal system and ensure that victims and their cases are adequately served. This unit could also coordinate with a local child advocacy center for interviewing and/or supportive services. Therapeutic resources and other referrals would be provided upon request or via a needs assessment.

BARRIERS TO THE CREATION OF A CVU

The creation of a CVU may be impeded by several factors. There may be reluctance to share responsibilities and decision-making processes with other agencies. Some prosecutors are also reluctant to open up their internal processes by aligning themselves with investigators, medical personnel, and child protection services. To some, the team approach may appear to be a loss of control over the process, or an admission of prior failings. Some may fear breaches of confidentiality and lack the level of trust needed to establish partnerships. Some prosecutors fear that specialization is limitation; they might feel that the needs of their offices are best served by general practice prosecutors who can be deployed on a variety of cases. Contrary to these fears, however, the powers of the prosecutor's office are not ceded to affiliated agencies through a CVU. Nor are the powers of other agencies ceded to the prosecutor's office. Statutory duties and responsibilities are retained. As issues become more complex, greater flexibility is required of prosecutors, both at the investigative and prosecution stages. The establishment of a CVU is a case management strategy that enables prosecutors to fulfill their primary duty: the search for justice. Members of a CVU team must find ways to come together and build the trust necessary to allay fears that will preclude establishing a unit that could promote justice for children and their families.

FUNDING FOR THE PROPOSED UNIT

In many cases, the greatest impediment to the implementation of a CVU is a lack of funding. Prosecuting offices run on tight budgets and

are constrained by the budgets of local and state governments. Despite the financial limitations of already strained budgets, sources of funds are available to support CVUs.

Ideally, this unit would be funded, in part or in whole, through state and federal grant money that is available for criminal justice programs that focus on prosecuting offenders in cases where the victims are children who have been physically abused. There are federal funds allocated to increase the number of communities working on developing a multidisciplinary team approach to child abuse (National Children's Alliance, 2003). Private institutions and corporations could be additional sources of funding. Matching grants from city and county sources could be obtained to assist in financing the Child Victim Unit. Community outreach efforts may also generate supportive funds. Cost could be minimized by borrowing or using the resources of local hospitals, child advocacy centers and social services, as well as resources already allocated to the prosecutor's office (office supplies, investigators, support staff, etc.).

CONCLUSION

The murder and severe physical abuse of children are among the most important cases handled by our criminal justice system. These cases deserve the highest priority. The influence of the prosecutor's office in these cases goes beyond the courtroom, reaching the medical establishment, advocacy groups, and the public at large. These complex cases demand an understanding of both technical medical evidence and legal issues. It is all of the prosecutor's responsibility to ensure that these cases are handled with compassion and understanding by appropriately trained attorneys.

Unfortunately, due to the constraints of an overburdened criminal justice system, these child victim cases do not currently receive the amount of time, resources, or attention needed. We, as prosecutors, need to take the lead in this area by creating specialized units that will efficiently and effectively prosecute these serious offenders and bring justice for our children and our community.

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APPENDIX

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