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Public Comment
National Commission on Children and Disasters
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On behalf of the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA), I would like to thank the members of the National Commission on Children and Disasters. We appreciate your efforts to call critical attention to the unique and unmet needs of children in such situations. We applaud the Commission in producing the 2010 Report to the President and Congress.

School social workers provide direct services to address barriers to learning and provide consultation to other school staff on classroom management and positive behavioral supports. They also link families with school and community resources to help meet students' social, emotional, and mental health needs, so that students can be successful in school.

As such, I respectfully request that the Commission strengthen their recognition of schools as a focal point of communities where children and parents are in familiar and trusted surroundings. Qualified school-employed mental health professionals (school social workers, school counselors, and school psychologists) are trained in addressing the mental health needs of children and their families. These professionals already have an understanding and background of the children affected by disaster in a community.

Furthermore, the organizations representing these school-employed professionals (the School Social Work Association of America, the American School Counselor Association, and the National Association of School Psychologists) regularly develop materials to recognize and address the mental health needs of children and their families in a variety of disaster situations. These resources are written in language easily understood by parents, teachers and members of the community.

Again, I ask the Commission to acknowledge the school-employed mental health professionals that currently exist in the community and can facilitate the goals of the commission and execute a coordinated and timely response, as well as ongoing follow-up.

SSWAA looks forward to working with the National Coalition on Children and Disasters to promote the policy and practice recommendations of the Commission.

Thank you for your time,

Libby Kuffner Nealis, MSSW