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TESTIMONY

BILL: AB112 – Requires any agency conducting a child abuse/neglect investigation of a child under 3 years old that involves physical abuse ensure that the child is examined by a provider of health care who is trained to recognize indications of physical abuse of children.

NEVADA DIVISION OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

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Good morning Chairwoman Koivisto and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. I'm Edward Cotton, Administrator for the Nevada Division of Child and Family Services. I am here to offer testimony in support of AB112, which requires agencies that conduct child abuse/neglect investigations to take an additional step to ensure that a thorough investigation occurs on our most vulnerable population – children under three years of age.

During the past fiscal year, more than 4200 children under the age of three were investigated for alleged child abuse/neglect. In most situations, the child was unable to articulate how s/he received the injuries that resulted in the report. Child protective investigators and police officers are often in the position of determining whether the injuries were in a manner consistent with the parent's explanation. This requires a degree

of medical expertise that most investigators do not possess. This is a medical determination. This Bill will ensure that it becomes one. I believe this Bill is necessary for consistency since three separate child protection entities conduct these investigations, along with many police jurisdictions.

Since Nevada law requires the State Central Child Abuse Registry to expunge "Unsubstantiated" reports of child abuse/neglect, we cannot provide an exact number of children in this age group who are re-injured at a later time. However, there are several documented cases of children being critically injured or killed after initial injuries were described as being "consistent with the parent's explanation" by a person not medically trained. This Bill will also help ensure that a parent is not "substantiated" based upon an investigator feeling that the explanation is not consistent – and then having the finding overturned later when a medical person makes a different determination. If this Bill is passed, I will be writing Regulations that require this medical examination for these children before a child protective investigator can make a final determination of "Substantiated" or "Unsubstantiated". It is a key element in our efforts to create a "Best Practices" model in Nevada that ensures that investigations of child abuse/neglect are thorough, competent, and reach the right conclusion.