



Child abuse is not a serious crime in California. Seriously.

By Sheila Boxley

Nearly a half million children are reported abused or neglected in California each year, with at least one child dying from that mistreatment every day. Many more cases go unreported.

In Sacramento County alone last year, 18,582 children were reported abused.

Yet under California law, child abuse is not classified as a “serious” or “violent” crime. Neither is pimping a child for prostitution, nor using them to make pornography. Unbelievable? Check the penal code.

In a state where voters passed an initiative three years ago protecting the rights of farm animals, this codified disregard for the safety of children is especially troubling. The sad truth is you’re better off abusing a child in California than hurting a chicken.

If we’re serious about preventing child abuse, reclassifying it as a serious and violent crime is an essential first step, which is precisely what AB 1188 would do. The bill’s author, Sacramento Assemblyman Richard Pan, is a pediatrician who has witnessed the terrible physical and psychological damage suffered by children who have been abused, and understands that its impact is far-reaching — for the victims and for taxpayers.

According to a study by the national Centers for Disease Control, children who endure as few as four traumatic experiences in their young lives are significantly more likely to go to prison, be substance abusers, suffer chronic illnesses or commit suicide as adults. As a state, we’re spending billions of dollars every year dealing with these sad consequences of child abuse.

Overcrowded prisons? Some 85 percent of California inmates were abused as children, according to the California Attorney General’s Office. Substance abuse? Child abuse victims are 1,030 times more likely to abuse drugs and 740 times more likely to abuse alcohol, according to the Centers for Disease Control. The long-term health care costs associated with child abuse are staggering. Victims are 160 times more likely to be morbidly obese as adults, 220 times more likely to smoke and 1,220 times more likely to commit suicide, which is why the center calls child abuse this nation’s number-one public health crisis. Moreover, child abuse victims are significantly more likely to abuse their own children or beat up their spouses.

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AB 1188 will help break this destructive cycle by officially recognizing child abuse as the serious crime it is. Under the bill, the following crimes would be designated “serious” or “violent” felonies: physical child abuse; assault resulting in the death of a child under eight; felony child abuse likely to produce great bodily injury or death; persuading, luring or transporting a minor under 13; and human trafficking. That these horrific crimes are not now classified as “serious” or “violent” under California law is incomprehensible.

In a state where homicide is the leading cause of injury death among children less than a year old, and where one child out of twenty is abused, it’s time to let the abusers, pornographers and child traffickers know that we’re serious about stopping them. If the law doesn’t consider their acts serious, why should they?

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Our Mission: *To prevent child abuse, neglect and abandonment through safety, education and advocacy.*