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To The Editors of the Miami Herald:

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Unfortunately, difficult economic times, such as those we are experiencing now, have been shown to lead to an increase in neglect and abuse cases. Stress, despair and financial crisis can make a parent do things that he/she would never otherwise do. Parents who lose their child care are often left with less than ideal options. The highest risk for abuse, and especially *shaken baby syndrome*, arises when a single mom leaves her child with an unrelated man such as a boyfriend while she works.

It is critical that we come together in South Florida to raise awareness of child abuse and neglect, especially during this deep recessionary period, and that we provide the support to parents to ensure our community's children are protected.

In South Florida, there are several initiatives and organizations undertaking the vital work to protect children. Unfortunately, child abuse and neglect continue to be a growing problem in South Florida. To make matters worse, deep funding cuts to social service agencies coupled with more than 198,000 Hotline abuse reports last year have combined to create an overwhelming budget crunch for agencies across the county.

Child Abuse Prevention Month is a time to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect and encourage individuals and communities to support children and families. As concerned citizens, we need to tell our legislature to keep these programs not just alive but financially robust, recognizing the importance of keeping our children physically safe and emotionally well nurtured.

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