

CHILD ABUSERS - A NATIONAL DATA BASE CAN SAVE CHILDREN'S LIVES

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In an age when computers store mountains of information on a single chip, search it in seconds and ship it around the world at the touch of a button, it seems absurd and dangerous that states cannot easily share information on people who abuse children.

Too expensive? What is the price of a child's life?

Irika Peterson isn't here to tell us. She's dead, stabbed and sliced to death with a knife and scissors by her mother, **Tammy Burse**, according to Detroit Police. Other children in the home said the savage attack began after investigators from state Child Protective Services knocked at **Burse**'s home, waited and left, unaware that she had a history of child neglect in Illinois. With that knowledge, they might have reacted better when **Burse** refused to answer the door.

But there is no national data base to track child abusers, who often move from one state to another to escape their past or stay ahead of the law. It is easier to identify a parent who is behind on child support than one with a history of child abuse or neglect.

Nearly every state, including Michigan, keeps a confidential list of such people, which can be used to check applicants for jobs involving children. But the information doesn't leave the state. And Michigan has no ready access to the lists maintained by other states.

Part of the problem is the lack of uniform standards for placing names on the list. Michigan, which lists more than 176,000 names, uses a "preponderance of evidence" of abuse or neglect, not a criminal conviction. There is a risk, too, of an incorrect or unfair listing being nationally circulated.

But these are problems that must be overcome. The risk of doing nothing is greater.

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