October 6, 2014

Dear Kansas International Film Festival Organizers,

We, the undersigned, are board certified practicing pediatricians, child abuse pediatricians, forensic pathologists, neuropathologists, pediatric radiologists, pediatric neurologists, and pediatric subspecialist physicians in a range of other medical fields. Signatories include the past presidents of the Child Abuse Committee of the Society for Pediatric Radiology, and past chairs and executive committee members of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Section and Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect, past chairs of the Subboard on Child Abuse Pediatrics of the American Board of Pediatrics, and past board members of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC). We have expansive knowledge of the medical literature pertaining to pediatric diagnoses and extensive clinical experience diagnosing and treating infants and child abuse victims. We have also conducted research and authored many books and scientific literature in the field of pediatrics, child abuse pediatrics, and other pediatric medical disciplines. Many of the undersigned are active in academic arenas in training physicians and other medical professionals in the evaluation and treatment of child maltreatment.

Recently we were informed of the existence of a new documentary film entitled "The Syndrome" that is currently scheduled to be screened at your upcoming film festival. Although this film has not yet been released, a trailer is available for viewing online. The prerelease materials also clearly state that the film provides a national platform for the tiny handful of well-known child abuse defense witnesses to publicize their fringe message -- that shaking an infant cannot cause death or traumatic brain injury. The release of this new film via your film festival is also garnering press and social media attention.

We write to you collectively with two goals.

First, we must alert you to the fact that this documentary is a gross and deliberate mischaracterization of vital public health and child safety issues. There is no support in the evidence-based medical literature for the filmmakers’ incendiary claim that "Shaken Baby Syndrome, a child abuse theory responsible for hundreds of prosecutions each year in the US, is not scientifically valid. In fact… it does not even exist." To the contrary, there is extensive medical literature substantiating the evidence base and clinical validity of the medical diagnosis of abusive head trauma. According to the Centers for Disease Control

1 http://vimeo.com/105378212
2 http://www.resetfilms.com
3 Over the past four decades, AHT/SBS has been well documented in the peer-reviewed medical literature. The research supporting this diagnosis includes: (1) two medical treatises, (2) at least fourteen chapters in medical treatises; (3) over seven hundred peer-reviewed clinical medical articles published by over one thousand medical authors from at least twenty-eight countries, (4) at least eight systematic reviews of the
and Prevention, “Shaken Baby Syndrome is a leading cause of death in the United States” because “vigorously shaking a baby can be fatal.” The Mayo Clinic defines “Shaken Baby Syndrome” as “a form of child abuse that can result in permanent brain damage or death.” The following international and domestic medical organizations have publicly recognized the validity of the Shaken Baby Syndrome diagnosis.

Second, the trailer initially posted online revealed that the filmmakers have engaged in express defamation evincing actual malice through the use of interview clips deliberately edited to mischaracterize the medical evidence and to harm the reputation of individuals who were never asked to consent to participation in this project. In fact, these filmmakers have effectively conceded these unethical misrepresentations by editing the trailer on October 2, 2014 in response to litigation warnings -- although they have refused to provide an advance copy of the film so we cannot assess the extent or degree of any further inaccuracies.

As pediatric experts with decades of experience diagnosing and treating infants who die or suffer traumatic brain injury at the hands of caregivers, we are profoundly concerned that “The Syndrome” disseminates false and misleading information that will put infants’ lives at risk. This is a public health matter and as organizers of this film festival we hope you share this concern. Under these circumstances, we also hope that you will reconsider featuring this film as part of your upcoming festival. In the event that you decide to continue with premiering this film, we may opt to pursue additional legal action.

This film will also undermine state and national child abuse prevention efforts including laws targeted at reducing infant deaths and traumatic brain injury caused by shaking. So at the very least, we expect you will find a way to also provide accurate medical and public health information during the festival that communicates the medical realities of AHT/SBS. We would be willing to help by connecting you with a local physician who can speak directly to the audience before or after the film, an announcement to be read before the film, and accurate written information about the risks of shaking infants and about local and national prevention information that could be disseminated.

4 http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/headsup/sbs.html
6 http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/shaken-baby-syndrome/basics/definition/con-20034461
7 The World Health Organization; The American Academy of Pediatrics; The American Academy of Ophthalmology; The American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus; The American College of Radiology; The American Academy of Family Physicians; The American College of Surgeons; The American Association of Neurologic Surgeons; The Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America; The American College of Emergency Physicians; The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health; The Royal College of Radiologists; The Royal College of Ophthalmologists; The Canadian Paediatric Society; and The American Academy of Neurology.
Please respond promptly to Ryan Steinbeigle, Executive Director, National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome by email at rsteinbeigle@dontshake.org.

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