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CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

The Governor's Office of Adoption and Child Protection issued a statutorily required 18-month child abuse prevention and permanency plan. The report is designed to reflect the state's commitment to engaging state agencies and local communities in a collaborative effort to prevent child abuse, abandonment and neglect, to promote adoption and to support adoptive families. In a cover letter accompanying the report, Chief Child Advocate Jim Kallinger said, "Florida has made respectable progress in many areas of child welfare and we can have a sincere discourse on our successes." Kallinger noted that the state has fewer resources to work with now, but said the tools and structures in place will allow the state to move forward on behalf of its children. A copy of the *Florida Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Plan: January 2009-June 2010* is available online at

www.dcf.state.fl.us/opengov/docs/strategicintnt.pdf.

DCF STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Just a few months after taking the reins of the Department of Children & Families, new Secretary George Sheldon has issued a document outlining his strategic vision for the agency over the next two years. The "Strategic Direction 2009-2011" outlines Sheldon's intent on what the department and its partners are expected to accomplish this year and in the future. The document will provide a framework for developing operational business plans to guide the agency's initiatives, including when they will be accomplished and how they will be measured. The 40-page document covers such key DCF initiatives as child protection and family preservation, Children's Legal Services, child care, domestic violence, and substance and mental health. The document is available online at www.dcf.state.fl.us/opengov/docs/strategicintnt.pdf.

FAMILY SAFETY DIRECTOR

The state's Office of Family Safety has a new director: Alan Abramowitz, who previously ran the Department of Children & Families' operations in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. As



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director, Abramowitz will oversee the office charged with child welfare issues, including child abuse investigations, foster care licensing and placements, adoptions, child abuse prevention efforts and independent living services. He has been with DCF in various roles since 2000, including stints in charge of operations in Pinellas and Palm Beach counties and a four-county Central Florida region. An attorney, he has served as a prosecutor and public defender and as assistant general counsel at the Department of Juvenile Justice in Orlando. He succeeds Patricia Badland, who will now serve as deputy director of the Family Safety office. The Coalition expresses its appreciation to Pat Badlands for her leadership and service and welcomes Alan Abramowitz to his new role.

EDUCATION RANKING

Top state leaders touted a new report that ranked Florida's the caliber of education in the state as the 10th best in the nation, up from 14th a year ago. Florida's overall "grade" on the *2009 Quality Counts: Portrait of a Population* report rose from a C-plus to a B-minus. The annual report from the *Education Week* publication tracks state policies and performance across key areas of education and gives each state a letter grade. Florida made a huge jump up the rankings in 2007, when it climbed to 14th after being ranked 31st the year before. Among the top areas contributing to Florida's ranking were Teaching Profession (#4 in the nation), K-12 Achievement (#7) and Standards, Assessment and Accountability (#12).

CLAUDINE RYCE



Child advocates throughout Florida mourned the passing of Claudine Ryce, who channeled her grief from the kidnapping and murder of her 9-year-old son Jimmy and turned it into a national advocacy for crime victims and missing children. Her actions led to the passage of the Jimmy Ryce Act, a Florida law that allows state officials to keep repeat sex offenders locked up even after their criminal sentences are served, if they can convince a judge that the inmate is likely to commit further acts of sexual violence. Claudine Ryce, age 66, died unexpectedly at her home in Miami Beach, to which she and



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husband Don had recently moved from Vero Beach. In a statement, Florida Attorney General Bill McCollum noted, "There is no doubt Claudine made a significant difference on behalf of our children and their families, and with her death Florida has lost an exceptional woman."

FOSTER CARE IMPACTS

The Department of Children & Families is helping to circulate a new presentation and video on Young Children in Foster Care. Both the presentation and video are available on the Florida Mental Health Institution website and can easily be accessed from DCF's main internet home page (www.myflorida.com/cf_web/). The presentation is filled with facts and figures on the role of foster care in the lives of young children. The video and presentation can be found directly at <http://cbcta.fmhi.usf.edu/flcwp/confvids/fostcareorlando/fs.html>

JIMMY RYCE ACT CLARIFIED

Clarifying an earlier ruling, the Florida Supreme Court held that a sexual predator must be in lawful custody when the state starts proceedings to keep him locked up under the Jimmy Ryce Act. Resolving a disagreement between two appeals courts, the justices concluded that the Legislature intended that an individual be in lawful custody when steps are taken to initiate civil commitment proceedings under the act, which allows state officials to keep repeat sex offenders who might commit further acts of sexual violence. At issue was whether officials could begin commitment proceedings against a convicted offender who had already been released from prison after completing his criminal sentence. The Supreme Court ruling means that such proceedings must begin while the offender is still in custody. The court's opinion is available online at www.floridasupremecourt.org/decisions/2009/sc06-139.pdf.

NEW JUSTICES

Florida's two newest state Supreme Court justices include a jurist who understands first-hand the many issues surrounding adoption. Justice Ricky Polston and his wife Deborah are the





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parents of 10 children, including an adopted group of six siblings. Polston, who served on the appeals court in Tallahassee prior to his elevation to the state's highest court, is a native of the small North Florida town of Graceville. He and Justice Jorge LaBarga recently had their investitures as the newest members of the Supreme Court, following their appointments by Governor Charlie Crist. LaBarga, a Wellington resident who was born in Havana, Cuba, was a circuit court judge in Palm Beach County, where he previously served as both a public defender and a prosecutor.

CYBERSAFETY EDUCATION

Driven in part by a new partnership with the state's school resource officers, the CyberSafety Education program conducted by the Florida Attorney General's Office has already passed 100,000 students served in the current school year. The program is an interactive 50-minute presentation that combines real-life stories and examples to help Florida's middle and high school students identify ways they could be victimized by online predators. Last fall the Attorney General's Office joined forces with the Florida Association of School Resource Officers to help bring the CyberSafety Education program to more students. As a result, officers have completed more than 250 presentations around the state and topped the 100,000 milestone in just over five months.

WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME



A woman who has spent the last three decades fighting drug use among youths was one of three individuals recently named to Florida Women's Hall of Fame. Betty Sembler, who founded the Straight, Inc., non-profit drug treatment program, has served on countless boards dedicated to fighting drug addiction. Straight, Inc.'s efforts are credited with helping some 12,000 young people across the country. Sembler, whose husband is U.S. ambassador to Italy, also helped shape national anti-drug policies through her work starting in the mid-1980s with the White House Conference for a Drug-Free America. She will be inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame along with Louise H. Courtelis, a successful



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international businesswoman, philanthropist and long-time supporter of higher education and veterinary care in Florida; and Sen. Gwen Margolis, a long-time elected official from South Florida who championed women's issues and ethics legislation.

MEDICAID SETTLEMENT

Florida Attorney General Bill McCollum announced that a major pharmaceutical company reached a massive global settlement agreement with Florida, other states and the federal government over improper marketing of the anti-psychotic medication Zyprexa, including treatment of children. Civil and criminal payments by Eli Lilly & Co., Inc., total more than \$1.4 billion, including \$35.6 million to Florida. The settlement resolves a case stemming from an aggressive 2001 marketing campaign in which the company allegedly marketed Zyprexa for a number of off-label uses. Doctors are allowed to prescribe drugs for off-label uses – or uses for which the drug wasn't originally designed – but pharmaceutical manufacturers cannot market their products for those alternative uses. Zyprexa has been associated with an especially high risk of weight gain, hyperglycemia and diabetes. Officials said it was marketed for untested and unapproved uses by children and by elders suffering from dementia and depression. The global settlement is the largest recovery in the nation's history in a health care fraud investigation.

GUBERNATORIAL APPOINTMENTS



Governor Charlie Crist appointed four individuals to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention State Advisory Group. Appointed were: John Ferro of Lake Helen, a minister and counselor with Dunamis Community and Outreach Ministries Inc.; Charles Jenkins of Lake City, executive director of Columbia and Suwannee County Teen Courts; Tony Jones of Gainesville, community relations coordinator with the Gainesville Police Department, and Ivan Tucker of St. Petersburg, a probation officer with the Florida Department of Corrections.



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BUSINESSES RECOGNIZED

The state honored five businesses for their contributions in support of Florida's children. Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp and Juvenile Justice Secretary Frank Peterman presented Governor's Community Investment Awards to the businesses for their voluntary efforts to reduce juvenile delinquency in Florida's communities. Kottkamp cited the businesses as solid examples of the benefits of public-private partnerships, while Peterman said the businesses give Florida children "greater hope." The five businesses and the programs they support are Citrix Systems Inc., of Fort Lauderdale (PACE Center for Girls, Broward); Interfaith Emergency Services of Ocala (Food 4 Kids Program); Junior Service League of Panama City (Operation A.S.A.P.); Spring Engineering Inc. of Holiday (2008 RAP River Run), and Winter Park Construction of Maitland (PACE Center for Girls of Orange County).

IMMUNIZATION SUMMIT

The Department of Health, along with the Suwannee River Area Health Education Center, have scheduled the 2009 Florida Immunization Summit for May 5-6 in Tampa. The theme of this year's event is "Immunizations Across the Lifespan," with numerous workshops and sessions highlighting accomplishments and strategies to achieve immunization goals for childhood, adolescent and adult vaccinations. More information is available at www.immunizeflorida.org/summit.

A TASK FORCE BY ANY OTHER NAME ...



After 19 months as the Task Force for Child Protection, the state panel designed to examine gaps in Florida's child protection system has decided it needs a new name. The panel was created by then-DCF Secretary Bob Butterworth but has a newly expanded scope under Secretary George Sheldon, and concluded it should have a more suitable name. With Butterworth as its chairman, the revised task force will promote the integration of mental health and substance abuse services into child welfare, promote information sharing between agencies and service providers and continue to identify gaps in Florida's child protection system that can be



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corrected by legislative, policy or procedural changes. The panel held a contest to find a new name, taking submissions from Floridians between the ages of 18 and 26 who were previously in foster care in the state. Sheldon will choose the winning entry based on recommendations from members of the Florida Youth SHINE Board and hopes to name the winning entry at the Statewide Dependency Summit in August.

PREVENTING LEAD POISONING

With an eye toward reducing problems caused by lead paint in day care centers, schools and other facilities, the state Department of Health began promoting a federal Renovate Right pamphlet. According to rules governing the federal Renovation, Repair and Painting Program, renovators will have to provide a copy of the new brochure *Renovate Right: Important Lead Hazard Information for Families, Childcare Providers and Schools* to homeowners, building managers, day care centers, schools and occupants of older housing before beginning renovation work. The new requirement is the latest component of a comprehensive federal effort to prevent lead exposure. The Renovation, Repair and Painting program has been underway for a number of years in order to eliminate childhood lead poisoning. The goal of the new brochure is to allow families and targeted businesses to make informed decisions when planning repair projects.

AMBER ALERT DAY



The Florida Department of Law Enforcement joined local, state, federal and private partners to commemorate National Amber Alert Awareness Day. On January 13 each year, the U.S. Department of Justice leads a nationwide remembrance of the abduction and brutal 1996 murder of Texas 9-year-old Amber Hagerman, for whom the Amber Alert plan was named. FDLE Commissioner Gerald Bailey urged Floridians to sign up to receive free Amber Alerts via email and cell phone text messages by going to www.missingchildrenalert.com. Last year the FDLE Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse issued 12 Amber Alerts, and since the



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program's inception in 2000 a total of 137 alerts have been issued, with 45 children located as a direct result.

AGRICULTURE LITERACY DAY

Agriculture industry volunteers are being encouraged to read a special children's book developed for the occasion when Florida marks Agriculture Literacy Day on March 24. Florida Agriculture in the Classroom Inc. is encouraging the use of "These Florida Farms," a rhyming children's book produced by the state Department of Agriculture to teach youngsters about different commodities produced in Florida. Teachers who register to participate in the event will receive books, lesson plans, bookmarks for children and other items. The registration website is www.agtag.org.

This is a monthly publication of the Florida Coalition for Children. We would appreciate hearing your comments and suggestions for improving this publication. Please contact Mike Cusick at Mike@FIChildren.org with your comments and suggestions.

