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**Statewide meeting addresses disparities in outcomes
for children and families of color in child welfare**

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Nov. 7, 2017) – Racial disproportionality and disparities for youth and families of color in the area of child welfare services will be the topic of statewide meeting this week.

The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services' (CHFS) Department for Community Based Services (DCBS), Hardin County Family Court Judge Brent Hall, and community leader and juvenile justice advocate Pastor Edward Palmer will host the annual meeting of the Race Community and Child Welfare (RCCW) Initiative on Thursday, Nov. 9, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Elizabethtown Tourism Center, 1030 North Mulberry St., Elizabethtown, Ky.

DCBS Commissioner Adria Johnson said the forum lets child welfare partners discuss strategies to remove barriers for children and families of color.

“Racial disproportionality is prevalent in Kentucky’s child welfare program, but by focusing attention to solutions that are specific to the problem, we can preserve families and achieve good outcomes for all children,” Johnson said.

In Kentucky, racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes for children of color occur across all public systems. Nationally, children of color are overrepresented in child serving agencies such as education, child welfare and juvenile justice in comparison to their percentage of the population.

Disparate outcomes include children of color removed from their homes and entering out of home care at a rate one and a half times to that of white children. Data shows that children of color are:

- less likely to achieve permanency when exiting out of home care
- less likely to graduate from high school
- more likely to be suspended from school
- are more likely to be committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice for offenses and
- more likely to be referred to criminal court as a youthful offender.

The RCCW Initiative engages public system and community partners in developing and evaluating local collaborations and strategies aimed at eliminating disparities for children of color in the child welfare system. In the last year, Hardin County collaborative efforts have eliminated the overrepresentation of African-American children entering foster care in that county. The percentage of children of African-American heritage entering foster care in Hardin County is lower than their representational percentage of all children in the county.

Johnson said the state's RCCW program sponsors workshops for DCBS staff, childcare agency providers and other partners to reduce racial bias; provides diversity information for foster parent training and distributes a quarterly newsletter.

Pastor Palmer, of the Sign of the Dove Church in Radcliff, said that racial disparity is a community issue and will take all stakeholders working toward a solution.

"With the number of children in care growing, the state needs support to meet their psychological and biological needs," Palmer said. "It really takes the village to assist those families in crisis, to facilitate better outcome for families and children."

Palmer provides a visitation center at his church for parents and children removed and in foster care to visit frequently thereby increasing the chances of reunifying the family.

Judge Hall said that Family Court judges like himself play an important role in listening to families and encouraging the development of community supports to meet the needs of vulnerable families.

"Judicial leadership is critical to setting expectations for family engagement for all involved with families dealing with child maltreatment," Hall said.

Judge Hall helps facilitate Hardin County's Minority Advisory Council, which focuses on improving child protection and court processes, resources and family engagement. Hall recently led a training session of 25 participants, which included court personnel, Foster Care Review Board members, Family Resource Center Coordinators, CASA advocates and community members.

Judge Karen Howze, a national expert on cultural competency and Judge in Residency with the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges, will also speak at the annual meeting.

For more information about DCBS programs and Kentucky child welfare, log on to <http://chfs.ky.gov/dcbs/>.

For more information about how you can become a foster or adoptive parent, or to get more general information about supporting families in the child welfare system, email: openhearts@ky.gov, visit the state adoption website adopt.ky.gov, which helps families more easily navigate the foster care and adoption process or call 1-800-232-KIDS (5437).

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.