



Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services to Partner with Feeding America for Annual Child Support Awareness Drive

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Springfield– In honor of National Child Support Awareness month in August, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) has teamed up with Feeding America® to help support local families amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

“Every year, our team has generously donated school supplies, books, time and money, and this year, the need to help children throughout Illinois is deeper than ever,” said Theresa Eagleson, HFS Director. “I’m sure we will step up to this new challenge. Families are struggling like they never have in our lifetimes, and we are here to offer our support.”

The department is calling on staff to donate to food banks in their communities. Feeding America, which has a nationwide network of 200 food banks, has created a special

online donation tool for the department, which will direct staff contributions to their local food banks. The donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. More information can be found online at: www.feedingamerica.org/csaware.

This August marks the 45th anniversary of the Child Support Enforcement Program, established in 1975 with Section IV-D of the Social Security Act. In years past, the HFS's Division of Child Support Services has marked National Child Support Awareness Month with service projects that connect staff to their communities. Last year, employees voluntarily donated more than 9,000 books and \$4500 to focus positive attention on the importance of families.

The Division this year is focusing on the reality that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused for families across the country and the increased difficulty in accessing affordable and healthy food. Experts have called the level of need unprecedented, with long lines occurring at food banks. As of June 2020, 1 out of 5 households in the U.S. report not having enough money to purchase food to meet the needs of their families.

The pandemic has also exacerbated racial inequities in food insecurity. Black and Hispanic households are now about twice as likely as white households to be struggling with food, and nearly four out of ten Black households with children are experiencing difficulties.

Throughout the pandemic, the department has continued to oversee payments of child support, with staff and online resources remaining available to answer questions. Child support has been shown in studies to reduce poverty and supports family self-sufficiency, reduces public spending and increases the involvement of non-custodial parents in children's lives. It helps lift children out of poverty and contributes to improvements in all aspects of their lives.

Research shows that child support has positive benefits on the cognitive and educational outcomes of children. It accounts for about 16% of the family income. For families whose income is below the poverty level, child support represents about 50% of the family income.

In Illinois, HFS provides child support services to more than 440,000 families. These services range from helping parents establish paternity to establishing a fair child support order and enforcing them when necessary. The services are available to anyone needing them, regardless of economic status.

In the state 2020 fiscal year, more than \$1.3 billion in child support was collected and disbursed.

Illinois encourages parents to apply for the free services offered by HFS. They can be explored at: www.childsupport.illinois.gov.