

Illinois Department Of Healthcare And Family Services Partners With United Way For Annual Child Support Awareness Month Campaign

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SPRINGFIELD - August is Child Support Awareness Month, and the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services' Child Support Division is marking the occasion by partnering with local United Way organizations for a donation drive to support their critical efforts in the communities they serve and getting the word out

about free services for custodial parents and children in families where they are not living with their parents.

Donations can be made by visiting: <https://pages.donately.com/unitedwayofmetrochicago/campaign/august-is-child-support-awareness-month-hfs-division-of-child-support-services-giving-campaign>.

HFS has regional Child Support offices in Aurora, Champaign, Chicago, Collinsville, Joliet, Marion, Peoria, and Rockford, and each is partnering with a local United Way branch that provides career and community-based family-building services.

“This year, we’re pleased to mark Child Support Awareness Month by partnering with United Way branches across the state to raise funds to support their critical mission in each of the communities they serve,” Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services Director Theresa Eagleson said. “At HFS, our mission is to work together to create better health outcomes and financial well-being for the customers we serve, while keeping equity central to what we do. Our missions align and we hope these local partnerships help us all to connect the families we often jointly serve with opportunities in their communities.”

Donors will be asked for their zip code, which will direct the funds they contribute to a local branch of the United Way. The donation website will be live through Sept. 10.

The United Way was chosen this year based on their ongoing efforts to provide services to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable members of their community, while also promoting philanthropy and volunteerism, making the communities they serve stronger.

"United Way is excited about working with the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services on this multifaceted donation drive because as an organization United Way has always been focused on supporting our neighbors in their time of need by connecting families to basic need services such as food, healthcare, and educational supports," said Sean Garrett, president, and CEO of United Way of Metro Chicago.

HFS is also in the midst of a 12-week social media campaign to raise awareness of the free child-support-related services the Child Support Division provides across the state, to mark Child Support Awareness Month. August is the designated month because it marks the anniversary of the establishment of the Child Support Enforcement Program in Section IV-D of the Social Security Act in 1975.

In Illinois, HFS provides child support services to more than 408,000 families. These services include helping parents establish paternity, establishing fair child support

orders, and enforcing them when necessary. The services are available to anyone needing them, regardless of economic status. In the state's fiscal year 2021, more than \$1.25 billion in child support was collected and disbursed.

Earlier this year, HFS changed its policy of charging automatic interest on past-due child support obligations, an equity-driven policy change. The policy disproportionately impacted low-income families and families of color, exacerbating the financial struggles of affected low-income Illinois families. The Department is now only assessing interest when ordered to do so by a court, mirroring the process currently in place for families with private child support arrangements.

Last year to mark Child Support Awareness Month, HFS teamed up with Feeding America to support Illinois families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic by making contributions to local food banks. In years past, HFS' Child Support Division has marked Child Support Awareness Month with several service projects, including book and school supplies drives.