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NC CHILD FATALITY TASK FORCE CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF PROMOTING POLICIES TO PROTECT THE LIVES OF NC CHILDREN

RALEIGH: Today the North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force released its 2011 Annual Report, celebrating its 20 years of successes and accomplishments.

Policies championed by the Task Force have helped save the lives of North Carolina children and improved overall safety. Since 1991, the child fatality rate has declined 37%. If the rate had remained the same, an estimated 8,000 more North Carolina children – 320 classrooms full of children -- would have died before reaching adulthood. Accomplishments of the Task Force include the following:

- Reductions in deaths due to motor vehicle crashes have been substantial, largely due to safety seats and graduated drivers' licenses. Since the requirement for child safety seats, the number of motor vehicle related deaths for children birth through age nine declined more than 25%. With the passage of the graduated driver license in North Carolina, driver crashes are down 38% for 16 year olds and 20% for 17 year olds. For both groups, the positive effect has continued.
- Other unintentional causes of death have been reduced as well. Since the helmet law passed, the number of bicycle deaths for children under age 15 declined by 60%. The number of children killed by fire and flame decreased by 44% following policies promoting broader use of smoke alarms.
- The caseloads of Child Protective Services staff have been cut in third – from about 1 worker for every 30 abused and neglected children in 1991 to about 1 worker for every 10 or 11 abused and neglected children today. This lower rate allows staff more time to provide services to vulnerable children to assure that they can grow up in permanent, stable families. Thanks to other improvements in the child welfare system, the rate of children removed from their homes to live with foster families has declined more than 10%.
- Infant mortality has declined 28% since the inception of the Task Force. A variety of strategies have contributed to this reduction. To help reduce SIDS and prevent other sleep-related deaths, professional and community trainings and educational messages have reached one million new parents, grandparents, medical professionals, child care staff and others in the past few years. To help reduce recurring premature births, North

Carolina was a leader in use of 17-Progesterone and cited by the National Conference of State Legislatures for the ground-breaking policy practice. The Task Force has also advocated for administrative policies to improve infant health by promoting breastfeeding.

“These results show that well-crafted public policies work. They are also a testament to the dedication and commitment of Task Force members and other partners to reducing child death and promoting the safety and well-being of children,” noted Elizabeth Hudgins, Executive Director of the Child Fatality Task Force.

“We need to continue this forward momentum,” continued Tom Vitaglione, Co-chair of the Child Fatality Task Force and senior fellow with Action for Children. “Moving into the next legislative session, it is critical that we build on these gains. The Task Force has an ambitious action agenda for the upcoming year that addresses the major and fastest-growing causes of child death in North Carolina, including infant mortality, motor vehicle crashes, poisoning, and injuries.”

Recommendations for legislative and administrative action are included in the Annual Report. Modest budget recommendations designed to preserve existing infrastructure that protects children are included in the legislative agenda.

“The Task Force walked a tightrope between making recommendations that address the key needs of keeping children safe and keeping budget requests at a minimum,” added Karen McLeod, Co-chair of the Task Force and President and CEO of Benchmarks (formerly the Child and Family Service Association). “We are optimistic that our policymakers will continue to make the budget investments and policy improvements that count most for kids.”

In addition to recommendations for the upcoming legislative session, the report includes data on child fatality from 2009, policy options vetted by the Task Force in 2010, administrative accomplishments of the Task Force, a review of 20 years of child fatality data in North Carolina, and information on state policies informed by local child fatality prevention teams.

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The full annual report is available on-line under Reports and Data:

<http://www.ncleg.net/DocumentSites/Committees/NCCFTF/Homepage/>

If you have trouble accessing the report, please contact Elizabeth Hudgins,

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The North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force is a legislative study commission consisting of 35 members with a broad spectrum of expertise. Since 1991, the Task Force has been charged with making recommendations to the Legislature and Governor for strategies to reduce child death and to promote the safety and well-being of children.