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North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force submits 2017 Action Agenda of recommendations to Governor and General Assembly

RALEIGH – The North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force (Task Force) has submitted its 2017 Annual Report to the Governor and the General Assembly containing recommendations aimed at reducing child deaths, preventing child abuse and neglect, and supporting the safety and well-being of North Carolina’s children.

This year’s recommendations address a broad range of issues including suicide prevention, motor vehicle safety, infant mortality, firearm safety, child maltreatment, the opioid epidemic, and more. “Our 2017 agenda is admittedly bold,” said Kella Hatcher, Executive Director of the Task Force, “but we believe that North Carolina’s children deserve nothing less.”

Deaths to infants make up two-thirds of all child deaths in North Carolina, so the work of the Perinatal Health Committee of the Task Force to reduce infant mortality and promote healthy birth outcomes is critical. They advanced recommendations that included funding for programs aimed at preventing tobacco use during pregnancy and preventing sleep-related deaths, legislation to add three conditions to the state’s newborn screening panel, and performing a study to assess access to risk-appropriate maternal and neonatal care in healthcare facilities.

After seeing the youth suicide rate spike in 2014, the Intentional Death Prevention Committee of the Task Force formed a core group of agency representatives who developed priority youth suicide prevention strategies that formed the basis of several Task Force recommendations, three of which are focused on improving the ability of school personnel to reach kids at risk. This committee also advanced a recommendation to increase funding for a program that performs critical work to identify and treat children who are suspected victims of abuse or neglect.

Out of the Unintentional Death Prevention Committee came recommendations to strengthen seat belt laws, to fund a firearm safe storage awareness campaign and free or discounted gun locks or lock boxes, and recommendations aimed at combating the state’s current opioid epidemic including funding for safe drug disposal and strengthening the state’s Controlled Substances Reporting System.

“These recommendations resulted from collaborative efforts of agency officials, lawmakers, experts in child health and safety, and community volunteers – a group uniquely qualified to recommend policy priorities that will absolutely save children’s lives if state leaders respond,” said Karen McLeod, Co-Chair of the Task Force.

The Task Force also has a number of items on its 2017 Action Agenda that are not legislative in nature but involve the formation of groups to bring key experts and stakeholders together to examine and discuss specific issues with the goal of bringing recommendations back to the Task Force in the fall. In 2017, the Task Force will have groups working on firearm safety, infant safe surrender (safe surrender laws are designed to prevent newborn abandonment), and advising a study to understand paid family leave insurance programs.

The full 2017 Action Agenda and the 2017 Annual Report are available on the website for the Child Fatality Task Force: <http://www.ncleg.net/DocumentSites/Committees/NCCFTF/Homepage/index.html>.

The Task Force is a legislative study commission and part of the state’s Child Fatality Prevention System, created in 1991. Since 1991, the child death rate has decreased by 46%. The latest child death data was released by the Task Force in November, 2016.