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## **State's child support agency launches book drive to promote family togetherness during Child Support Awareness Month**

### **HFS employees and Illinois residents asked to donate books and money to encourage reading**

**Springfield, Illinois** – To focus positive attention on the importance of families and child support, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services has launched a book drive during Child Support Awareness Month this August.

“Ensuring that financial resources get to the children who need them is our first responsibility, but child support is about more than money,” said Theresa Eagleson, director of HFS. “Family togetherness is vital for a healthy childhood, and reading as a family is one of the best ways to help bring this about.”

Employees at HFS offices throughout the state are donating books and money to the book drive, which will continue through the month. Donations will then be distributed to families through two respected non-for-profit organizations. The department encourages Illinois residents to also participate by dropping books off at one of the sites or donating directly to the organizations.

The two non-for-profit organizations that will be distributing the books are Bernie's Book Bank and Reach Out and Read.

Bernie's Book Bank distributes quality children's books to at-risk children throughout Chicagoland, delivering more than 15.8 million since 2009. Their goal is to empower at-risk children, from birth through sixth grade, to read their way to a better life.

To donate to Bernie's Book Bank, go to: <https://www.berniesbookbank.org/invest-in-children/>

Reach Out and Read is a statewide program that is part of the American Academy of Pediatrics, providing books to new parents and encouraging them to read to their children.

For Reach Out and Read, visit:

<https://reachoutandreadil.networkforgood.com/projects/64627-books-for-children>

“I am extremely proud and grateful to the HFS team who are contributing their time, books and money to help families throughout Illinois,” Eagleson said. “I hope others in our state will also take part this month and promote family reading.”

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## BOOK DRIVE/AD-1

HFS maintains book drop-off bins at all of its Child Support sites throughout Illinois, located in Aurora, Collinsville, Champaign, south Chicago, the Chicago Loop, Joliet, Marion, Rockford, and Springfield. The main HFS office in Springfield also offers a drop-off bin.

Office addresses may be found here:

<https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/ChildSupport/parents/Pages/Offices.aspx>

The department has chosen a service project every year for National Child Support Awareness Month. The efforts are helpful in raising awareness about the importance and benefits of ensuring that child support is provided effectively.

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 fiscal year that just ended, 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](http://www.childsupport.illinois.gov)

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