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The Early Childhood Court Team Launched a Safe Babies Court Initiative. DCFS, Court, Lurie prioritized well-being of children ages Zero to Three.

CHICAGO --The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services in partnership with the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago and First Lady Diana Rauner are pleased to announce the launch of the Illinois Early Childhood Court Team initiative that will reimagine and implement new ways of achieving better outcomes for the youngest children served by the child welfare system. The program is a collaboration between DCFS, Cook County Juvenile Court, Erikson Institute, and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

"The Safe Babies Court Project is one more opportunity for Illinois to continue to be a leader in innovative programming for our most at-risk children," said First Lady Diana Rauner. "This is an opportunity for us all to put into practice the great, the most important and the most powerful motivator in human development – which is love. Helping parents develop and express their love for their children in appropriate ways and supporting their most foundational moments is the primary effort that every human wants for the next generation. This is a tremendous honor for all of us."

"The research is clear. It is vital to intervene early in the lives of young children who have been affected by trauma," says Illinois DCFS Acting Director BJ Walker. "The years between a child's birth and age three form the foundation for their future well-being and are the most critical in the lifetime of a child. The Safe Babies Court helps to lay the groundwork, that in the near future, will support healthy relationships and ultimately strengthen families."

The Early Childhood Court Team (ECCT) is a therapeutic dependency court, often referred to as 'Safe Babies Court,' that utilizes judicial leadership informed by the developmental needs of infants and toddlers ages zero to three. The court will prioritize the well-being of very young children that have been exposed to early life trauma.

The launch kicked off at on July 13 at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, 225 E. Chicago Avenue on the 11th floor (Room 11-160) in Chicago.

The mission of the Safe Babies Court Project is to increase awareness among all professionals that work with maltreated infants and toddlers about the impact of abuse and neglect on very young children. It will also work to change local systems of care to improve outcomes and prevent future court involvement in the lives of very young children by addressing the structural issues in the system that prevent families from succeeding. The project will also work to improve collaborative problem solving and case coordination to enhance safety, well-being and permanence for young children in Illinois.

Children monitored by the Safe Babies Court also reach permanency three times faster while under court supervision. This includes 46.5 percent of the children being reunified with their families, 30.6 percent were placed in guardianship with relatives and almost 14 percent were adopted.

The ECCT initiative also greatly benefits the parents by safeguarding their parental rights will providing them with effective coordinated services. In this program, parents are supported every step of the way. In ECCT the saying is, “we coordinate...because babies can’t wait!”

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