

\*\*KEY REC\*\*60910304

ISSUE TITLE: Healthy Families Florida

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE:

The Department requests \$2,496,233 for services that are designed to prevent the removal of children from their homes to the more than 1,000 families whom Healthy Families Florida has lost the ability to serve due to budget reductions for 2008-2009.

STATEMENT OF NEED:

One of the greatest threats to the health of Florida's children is child abuse and neglect. In the state fiscal year 2005-2006 (the most recent data available), there were 237,290 reports of child abuse and neglect. Of these, 40 percent of the alleged victims were five years old or younger, which is the age group that is served by Healthy Families Florida. During this same time period, 121,202 children had one or more findings of "verified" or "some indicators" of child abuse or neglect.

In calendar year 2007, there were 442 deaths that were investigated for allegations of abuse or neglect. Of these, 86 percent were five years old or younger, which is the age group that is served by Healthy Families Florida. Of the 442 child death investigations, the Department of Children and Families determined that 159 children died from "verified" findings of abuse or neglect and 104 child deaths had findings with "some indicators."

An analysis by Florida's Child Abuse Death Review Team of the calendar year 2006 deaths with "verified" findings concluded that 95 percent of these deaths were preventable by the caretaker, the system or both.

Research has demonstrated that during economically distressed times, child abuse and neglect increases due to the added stressors placed on low income families and families at high risk of child abuse and neglect. In a June 2008 paper titled, "The Effect of the Economic Crisis on Families," the authors state that "economically-distressed parents tend to use harsh or inconsistent discipline even when they recognize and feel guilty about its effects." Research shows that children who suffer from abuse and neglect are more likely to need special education, drop out of school, become substance abusers, become teen parents, be involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and become reliant on long-term government. The families served by Healthy Families Florida are at high risk of abuse and neglect and are the very families that are negatively affected in economically distressed times.

WHAT WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THIS ISSUE?

Preventing abuse and neglect in the families served by Healthy Families Florida will aid in the Department of Children and Families' goal to achieve a 50 percent reduction in the number of children in the Child

Welfare System by 2012. A rigorous, independent five-year evaluation of Healthy Families Florida, released in February 2005, concluded that Healthy Families Florida has a significant impact on preventing child maltreatment. The evaluation also shows that children in families who completed the program or had long-term, intensive Healthy Families Florida intervention experienced 58 percent less child maltreatment than did comparison groups with little or no services. For Healthy Families Florida participants that successfully completed the program between October 1, 2005 and September 30, 2006, 96 percent of target and non-target children were free from abuse and neglect during the 12 months following completion.

#### HOW WILL THE ISSUE BE CARRIED OUT?

The Department of Children and Families will collaborate with Healthy Families Florida to identify children at risk of abuse and neglect and removal from their homes. This will be a continuation contract with the Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida that administers the Healthy Families Florida program.