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**Statewide News Release**

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**Duffel Bag Drive Will Help Hundreds of Children in Foster Care**

*State employee charity project was encouraged by Gov. Bevin's call to action*

**FRANKFORT, Ky.** (May 3, 2017) – A state employees' charity drive inspired by Governor Matt Bevin's initiative to help improve the state's foster care system will help hundreds of children in need.

The Foster Care Pack Drive, coordinated by staff at the Disability Determination Services (DDS), part of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services' Division of Income Support, raised \$4,241 which was used to purchase new bags. Those purchased, along with some that were also donated by employees, totaled almost 870 duffel bags for children in out of home care administered by the CHFS Department for Community Based Services.

Children come into state care through no fault of their own. Perhaps they are at risk due to abuse and neglect issues, or their parents have drug issues or are incarcerated.

"Many people don't realize that often times when children are removed from their home and placed into state custody, all their belongings are literally stuffed into a black garbage bag. Can you imagine how that makes them feel? No child deserves to be given a trash bag for their belongings," said CHFS Secretary Vickie Yates Brown Glisson. "I am so proud of this employee-led effort. It is heartwarming to know that the staff care this much about helping kids in need."

Deputy Commissioner Bryan Hubbard, who oversees DDS, attended the "Summit to Save Our Children" hosted by Governor Bevin and the First Lady on March 10 in Frankfort. The event was part of the Open Hearts/Open Homes initiative, which strives to find forever homes for children in foster care with a goal of adoption by relying on the state's churches and nonprofit groups to engage nurturing families in local communities.

Hubbard said he was inspired by DCBS Commissioner Adria Johnson's comments about the state's great needs for children in foster care.

"The entire experience was very moving," Hubbard said. "During her presentation, Commissioner Johnson said that many foster children often transport their belongings in garbage bags between placement destinations. The image of foster children carrying all their things from place to place in garbage bags was powerfully haunting."

Hubbard said the image inspired him to rally his DDS team and ask for assistance to address this dignity issue. Staff formed a “Pack Drive” committee led by DDS Operations Support Manager Heather Boggs to reach out to staff in DDS’ two offices, one in Louisville and one in Frankfort, with a combined workforce of 403 people.

Staff had the option to donate duffel bags or backpacks, or to make a monetary donation to make a bulk purchase. The majority of the bags were purchased with the raised funds.

Hubbard said his staff wants to be more involved in helping vulnerable children.

“We hope to adopt DCBS’ foster program and target specific needs of Kentucky’s foster children with additional drives during the remainder of 2017,” Hubbard said. “I’m proud to work with a special group of people who are willing to act with decisive charity on behalf of their most vulnerable brother and sister Kentuckians.”

Commissioner Johnson said she was touched by the efforts.

“This luggage collection is tremendous,” she said. “Our staff is so grateful that we can give children a dignified way to carry their belongings. We have been spreading the word to the public that even if you cannot become a foster parent, there is some smaller thing you can do for our children in out of home care. It’s wonderfully unexpected to get this gift from our own colleagues.”

The bags will be distributed to DCBS’ nine service regions and given to children as needed.

There are more than 8,100 Kentucky children in out of home care with active placements.

For more information about how you can become a foster or adoptive parent, or to get more general information simply email: [openhearts@ky.gov](mailto:openhearts@ky.gov), go to the state adoption website [adopt.ky.gov](http://adopt.ky.gov), which helps families more easily navigate the foster care and adoption process or call 1-800-232-KIDS (5437).

### ***About DDS***

Disability Determination Services makes disability determinations on behalf of the commissioner of Social Security for residents of Kentucky. The program uses federal regulations to determine disability for both Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI). The program also adheres to federal regulations for performance accuracy and processing time standards.

*The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state’s human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services, the Department for Public Health, and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.*

