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**Michigan One of Three States Chosen by U.S. Justice Department to Find Better  
Ways to Help Children Traumatized by Violence**

LANSING - All children should have the opportunity to grow up healthy, safe and ready to reach their full potential. Unfortunately, too many children in the United States have the innocence of childhood shattered by violence and trauma. As part of its "Defending Childhood" efforts, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, has selected Michigan as one of three states in the country to participate in the Defending Childhood State Policy initiative. This effort builds on the overall Defending Childhood initiative launched by the department in 2010.

The other states selected are California and Massachusetts. Each of the participating states will be provided technical assistance from the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice through September 2015, as well as assistance from national experts on how to build effective trauma-informed systems. With these supports, the Michigan team will develop a strategic plan to implement a statewide effort to identify, screen, assess and treat children who have experienced trauma caused by exposure to violence in their homes, schools, and/or communities.

"The research is very clear and troubling that children who have witnessed or experienced violence and do not receive the support and help they need are at enormous risk later in their lives and will likely never recover or reach their full potential," said Nick Lyon, director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. "This effort will help us identify and reach more of these children with the help they need and deserve before it is too late."

Collaboration is the key component of the initiative, which is aimed at finding effective ways to help those children who have been significantly and negatively impacted by violence and trauma. Senior-level policy makers will be working together with all relevant child-serving agencies within the state.

Michigan's development and implementation teams will have representatives from the Governor's office, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education, courts, law enforcement, private providers and the Detroit Youth Violence Prevention Initiative.

"The collaboration, coordination and commitment by the partners in this effort are critical to its success," said Steve Yager, executive director, Michigan Children's Services Agency. "Working together we will be able to change the course of children's lives."

More information on Defending Childhood is available at:  
<http://www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood>

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