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DHHS Convenes First Behavioral Health Children's System of Care Leadership Board Meeting

Karla Bennetts and Beth Baxter elected co-chairs of the Leadership Board

LINCOLN – Karla Bennetts, executive director for Families CARE, and Beth Baxter, chair of the Nebraska Children's Commission and regional administrator at Region 3 Behavioral Health Services, were elected co-chairs of the DHHS Behavioral Health Children's System of Care Leadership Board at its first meeting on Aug.23.

"The System of Care is a model that has helped many states transform how they deliver services for children and youth who have serious emotional disorders and their families," said Courtney Phillips, chief executive officer of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. "It integrates services by connecting and coordinating the work of state child-serving agencies, non-profits, local government organizations, behavioral health care providers, families, and youth."

"The implementation of the Nebraska System of Care for Children and Youth Initiative is an exciting and promising time for Nebraska," said Baxter. "I'm looking forward to working with our system partners and extremely grateful for the commitment of Governor Ricketts to Nebraska's children and families and the leadership of Courtney Phillips and Sheri Dawson, director of the Division of Behavioral Health."

Added Bennetts: "There has been a great deal of thought, time and commitment invested by many system partners as well as family members over the past few years in preparation for this, and the implementation of this project holds great hope for Nebraska youth and their families."

Gov. Pete Ricketts and CEO Phillips launched the initiative in April, and it is a priority identified in the recently released DHHS Business Plan. The Board will conduct regular meetings, and provide recommendations relating to the development and implementation of the Nebraska System of Care (NeSOC).

"Family and youth engagement and empowerment are priorities in all aspects of service planning and delivery and the NeSOC Leadership Board provides an avenue for key stakeholders to be involved," added Sheri Dawson, director of the Division of Behavioral Health. "It is built on the principle of equal partnership among system, family and youth partners. This builds trust and inclusion."

In addition to Bennetts and Baxter, board members include representatives from the Nebraska Family Support Network and the Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska in Omaha; the Healthy Families Project, the Administrative Office of Probation, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the Indian Center, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Project Everlast, and the Nebraska Department of Education in Lincoln, as well as DHHS representatives.

Next steps include building a complete data baseline and finalizing a financial blueprint of existing funding and people served across child-serving agencies. Within three to five years, said Dawson, Nebraska should see an increase in school attendance and school performance; an increase in the percent of youth and young adults living in a home setting; decrease the average age of first system contact, and decrease the cost per youth receiving services.

The next meeting will be held in early October.