

## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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**Caseworker, First Lady and others Urge Everyone to Help Prevent Child Abuse**  
*Rally held on Capitol steps to observe Child Abuse Prevention Month*



Arkansas First Lady Susan Hutchinson and a front line family service worker with the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) were among the speakers at a rally against child abuse held on the front steps of the Arkansas State Capitol today. They joined more than 100 people who came to bring attention to the problem of child abuse in Arkansas and let people know that they can help eliminate it by supporting children and families in their communities.

First Lady Susan Hutchinson talked about the important role everyone plays in preventing child abuse and asked everyone to keep the children and the people who support them in their thoughts. “If you’re the praying type, please pray for everyone who helps keep children safe and that our DHS caseworkers have the wisdom, courage and good judgement to help our children and families. She went on to talk about the toll child abuse has on children.

“Chronic abuse has a huge lifetime impact on children,” she said. “Studies have shown that abused children are more likely to go to prison, have a reduced life expectancy and health problems.”

She referred to one program that assists girls aging out of the foster care program by providing shelter and helping them to find a job or get in school. She said the program assigns each girl three women as mentors – one to serve as a sister, one as a mother and one as a grandmother. “We all need family,” she said. “Through chronic abuse those family relationships are often broken.”

Caseworker Tiffany Wright told the crowd that her world changed when she became a DHS Division of Children and Family Services caseworker. In 2009, she was a recent college graduate with an undergraduate degree in criminal justice and a Master’s degree in Human Services when she joined the

White County DHS office. There, she got an immediate introduction to the problems children and families face daily. "I realized quickly that I had led a very sheltered and protected childhood," Wright said. "I had watched problems like this on television shows, but this was real life I was seeing first hand for the first time. I probably spent the first year of my job in shock and then I adjusted." She said she loves her job helping children and families, although cases are often tough. "The first few times I dealt with drugs and physical abuse, that was hard," she recalls.

Wright said that while not everyone can serve as a foster parent or family, there are opportunities to support families in every community that can help prevent child abuse. She challenged everyone to help build stronger families by working with local organizations and programs.

It takes many people working together to care for and support the large number of children who interact with the state's child welfare system each year, Mischa Martin, interim director of the DHS Division of Children and Family Services said. "DCFS cannot tackle child abuse alone," Martin said. "Partnerships are the backbone of every successful prevention campaign and I'd like to thank the many partners who are with us here at the rally today," she said.

In State Fiscal Year 2015, there were 33,683 reports of child maltreatment accepted for investigation in Arkansas. Of those, 24 percent were determined to be true. At the end of the fiscal year, more than 4,418 youth were in foster care and an additional 7,400 children were receiving in-home and supportive services. The number of children currently in foster care had risen to 4,858.

"We can all work together to help and protect children in Arkansas. Not everyone can be a foster parent, but people can serve as mentors, help provide transportation or work with any of the number of groups that support children and families," Martin said.

To learn more about how to prevent child abuse go to [www.stoparchildabuse.com](http://www.stoparchildabuse.com). To learn more about becoming a foster parent, go to [www.fosterarkansas.org](http://www.fosterarkansas.org).

### **What should you do if a child discloses abuse to you?**

1. Listen. Do not fill in words for the child.
2. Allow the child to tell you what happened in his or her own words. Don't fill in what you think the child is going to say.
3. Tell the child you are glad he told you and they are not in trouble.
4. If the child asks you not to tell anyone, remind him that it is your job to keep him safe.
5. Do not be overly critical of the offender. Children are protective of people they care about, even if they are being abused.
6. Tell the child you believe him.
7. Don't express panic or shock.
8. Use the child's vocabulary to the child and when reporting the abuse to authorities.
9. Do not ask probing questions.
10. Do not project your own feelings about the abuse on the child.
11. Report the abuse to the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-482-5964.