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ADMH and Partners Celebrate Children's Mental Health Awareness Week

MONTGOMERY – Governor Bentley recently proclaimed May 5-11, 2013, as Children's Mental Health Awareness Week in Alabama, coinciding with both National CMHAW and National Mental Health Month, observed annually in May. The National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health sponsors CMHAW each year to increase public awareness of the triumphs and challenges in children's mental health, and to emphasize family and youth involvement in the children's mental health movement.

In recognition of this observance, the Alabama Department of Mental Health, community providers and advocacy organizations are partnering to raise public awareness about children's mental health. Events such as festivals, fairs, art events, pizza parties and game nights are taking place throughout the week. Educational efforts include presentations to schools, media appearances and mental health screenings.

In addition, people are encouraged to wear green ribbons and businesses have been asked to put out green bows or balloons during the week to show their support of CMHAW. Alabama Family Ties, an advocacy organization, also secured artwork from a youth consumer during its annual conference, which is featured on a CMHAW poster it has distributed throughout the state.

"Many people in our communities are directly affected by mental illnesses," said Dr. Beverly Bell-Shambley, associate commissioner of ADMH's Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. "The good news is treatment works and recovery is possible, but only if people can get access to treatment," she stated. The latest national data shows that mental health issues affect one in five children each year. In Alabama, approximately 25,000 children receive public mental health treatment every year. Nationally, less than one-half of children with a diagnosed mental illness receive treatment.

Bell-Shambley said, "The U.S. Surgeon General has reported that stigma is a major barrier to people seeking help when they need it. That's why CMHAW is so important. We want people to learn the facts and end myths to help break the stigma and silence that too often surround the topic. The more people know, the better they can help themselves or help their loved ones get the help and support they need. By changing attitudes about mental illness, we can change lives."

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RESOURCES

To learn more about CMHAW activities going on throughout the state, as well as children's mental health services in Alabama, contact the ADMH at 334-242-3200 or visit www.mh.alabama.gov.

Information about National CMHAW can be found at the National Federation of Families website at www.awarenessweek.ffcmh.org and SAMHSA's site at www.samhsa.gov/children/event_materials.asp.