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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**HEALTHY START AT RISK FOR DEVASTATING CUT IN FLORIDA SENATE**

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. -- The Florida Healthy Start program is at risk of losing its ability to provide essential services to Florida's mothers and infants and support healthy pregnancies and outcomes throughout our state. Locally, Healthy Start serves more than 16,000 families each year in Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau and St. Johns counties and the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition leads a local community effort to engage partners throughout the region to join in the effort to address the underlying societal & structural root causes of infant mortality and poor birth outcomes.

**This week, the Florida Senate is reviewing their proposed budget, which includes harmful proviso language and a \$19 million/30 percent funding cut to Florida Healthy Start that, if passed, will devastate this program. A decision will likely be made by Sunday.**

This proposed cut and proviso language will:

- Eliminate services to 6,600 high-risk pregnant women and infants statewide.
- Dismantle 25 years of community interventions and services that have made a significant impact in lowering Florida's infant mortality rate and supporting healthy pregnancies and outcomes.
  - **Florida has seen a 35% decrease in infant mortality** since 1991 due in part to the resources and services provided by Healthy Start.
- Threaten a proven, cost-effective system of local care and community intervention that provides education, support and resources for vulnerable families in all 67 counties of Florida.

In partnership with the Department of Health and Agency for Health Care Administration, under the office of Governor Rick Scott, Healthy Start is currently developing a new care delivery structure that will increase their community reach in helping Florida's mothers and infants and impact on infant mortality, prematurity and healthy child development by providing:

- A coordinated intake and referral infrastructure
- Standardized, evidence-based screening interventions within home visiting programs
- Evidence-based inter-conception care program
- Enhanced coordination with health plans

"These changes will most likely reverse all the improvements in infant mortality rates and the health of our communities and counties seen in the last several years," Coalition Board Chair Kenneth Scarborough said.

Infant mortality is a sentinel indicator of health – when communities experience infant mortality, it is a reflection of the overall health of a population.

**About the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition**

The Healthy Start Coalition leads a cooperative community effort to reduce infant mortality and improve the health of children, childbearing women and their families in Northeast Florida. For more information, visit <http://nefhealthystart.org> or on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @nefhealthystart.

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