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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HEALTHY START COALITION TO CELEBRATE 25 YEARS

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The first generation of Healthy Start babies is all grown up – and that’s a cause for celebration. The Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition is hosting an open house on May 11th to celebrate 25 years of service to the community and all of the babies that have lived to their first birthday – and beyond.

The open house will be an opportunity for the Coalition to share with the community the accomplishments and progress made in maternal and child health in the region. The event is Thursday, May 11th from 3-6 p.m. at the Coalition administrative office, 644 Cesery Blvd. Ste. 210, Jacksonville, FL.

Every baby deserves a healthy start and for the last 25 years, moms, babies and families throughout Florida have received support and education to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens have the best possible start to life.

In 1991, faced with an alarmingly high infant mortality rate, then-Governor Lawton Chiles and First Lady Rhea Chiles convened a group of community leaders and challenged them to build local coalitions to improve birth outcomes. The result was the landmark Healthy Start program.

Regional healthy start coalitions were developed to place control in the hands of the community, build systems of care and coordinate a diverse array of services on behalf of the highest-risk moms and babies. The Coalition model is a recognized catalyst for community involvement, collaboration and innovative services.

The Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition has served more than 200,000 families in Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau and St. Johns counties since its formation – through Healthy Start and a myriad of programs and initiatives developed based on the diverse needs of the community.

Healthy Start staff provide assessment, education and care coordination to more than 10,000 families each year in the region. An additional 8,000 pregnant women on Medicaid receive support through MomCare, a special outreach program that links women to managed care organizations, qualified prenatal care providers and community resources.

The Coalition has leveraged its knowledge and expertise to launch nationally-recognized programs like the Magnolia Project, which provides services for women before, during and after pregnancy on Jacksonville’s Northside; and the Azalea Project, which focuses on substance-using pregnant and parenting women. The Coalition’s Fatherhood PRIDE program extends case management and support services to an integral part of the family – dads and father figures. The Coalition also has assumed administration of the National Health Corps Florida program and Healthy Families Jacksonville.

As a result of Gov. Chiles' vision and years of work, more babies are celebrating their first birthdays. The infant mortality rate in the state and region has dropped by more than 35 percent. In Northeast Florida, there have been many other victories since 1991:

- The teen birth rate has dropped by more than 72 percent.
- There has been a 37 percent drop in women who receive no prenatal care during pregnancy.
- There has been a 63 percent drop in women who smoke during pregnancy.

The work is not done – the Coalition will continue to work with the community and partners to make sure every baby lives to see their first birthday.

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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