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## **Hillsborough County Partnership Launches Child Safety Awareness and Prevention Campaign**

- **More than three elementary school classrooms of children have died during the past six years in Hillsborough County from preventable causes**
- **The Children's Board of Hillsborough County, Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County have formed an alliance to combat preventable child deaths**
- **2-year countywide campaign developed in partnership with public and private partners**
- **Child safety experts optimistic about impact of united education campaign**
- **The campaign is launching in September during National Safe Baby Month**

**TAMPA, FL** – The Children's Board of Hillsborough County, in partnership with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County, and other public and private organizations announces the launch of their communitywide Child Safety & Awareness Campaign.

The idea for an awareness campaign came at the request of Nick Cox, Suncoast Regional Director for DCF, and Children's Board member. Cox receives detailed monthly statistics on child deaths in Hillsborough County, and was concerned to find that many of these deaths were, in fact preventable. Because of his service with the Children's Board, Cox approached Luanne Panacek, C.E.O. of the organization, and suggested that the agencies develop a first-ever collaborative education campaign involving multiple partners – both public and private – that would span Hillsborough County.

"Each month, we receive these child death reports and it's tragic that in many instances, these deaths were preventable," said Cox. "More than three entire elementary school classrooms of children have died in Hillsborough County in the past six years from preventable causes. Although they are considered "accidental," in fact, they are entirely preventable."

Panacek and Children's Board members responded immediately to convene partner organizations and community members.

"The well being of Hillsborough County children impacts all citizens," said Panacek. "Healthy children grow strong communities that offer a good quality of life. CBHC's vision is for Hillsborough County to be a community that values and supports its future generation. This vision can only be accomplished through partnerships such as these – we're proud to be a catalyst in this."

Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County, the lead county agency working to decrease infant mortality through prevention, had planned an independent education initiative which will now become part of the larger campaign.

"Our Safe Baby initiative utilizes our hospital partnerships to reach new mothers with critical parenting education and resources. Hospital-based parent education models are proven to significantly reduce the incidence of abusive head trauma in children and empower parents to better protect their baby from preventable causes of injury and death," said Jane Murphy, Executive Director for the Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County.

## For Interviews with:

- **Local families who have experienced preventable child death or injury**
- **National child safety experts**
- **Nick Cox, Suncoast Regional Director for the Department of Children and Families**
- **Jane Murphy, Executive Director of the Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County**
- **Luanne Panacek, C.E.O. of the Children's Board of Hillsborough County**
- **Hillsborough County Pediatricians – Carolyn Eastman at 813-531-0502 / Rick Lence at 813-476-9537**

## The Campaign

The Child Safety and Awareness Campaign launch will begin with broad-based community messages promoting awareness that address the leading causes of preventable child death in Hillsborough County. The Children's Board has developed partnerships with public and private industry to spread the collaborative message of prevention to all corners of our community throughout the next 2 years.

The campaign has partnered to work with CBS Outdoor in developing 16 billboards that will rotate countywide with different child safety messages. The intent of the boards is to call attention to some simple practices that can prevent a child safety emergency. Similar to the billboards, Hartline Buses also joined the initiative in developing 30 display ads running the length of their buses that will travel all routes and cover all sectors of Hillsborough County. Local grassroots newspapers, such as the Florida Sentinel-Bulleting and La Gaceta, will also publish display ads in their newspapers with prevention messages. Tampa Bay Parenting Magazine has also joined the partnership with a monthly ad highlighting awareness. All collaborative partners will also have a strong electronic presence on various websites relating to children and child safety.

The Children's Board is working with the Healthy Start Coalition's Safe Baby Campaign to fund new education and training materials that will be distributed to every new mother (appx. 18,000 each year) in every hospital in Hillsborough County. The curriculum will be implemented by nurses featuring an educational DVD and other learning materials for parents and caregivers. These items will be rolled out and piloted in hospitals this fall.

The Children's Board plans to utilize its five Family Support and Resource Centers (FSRC), as neighborhood access points for education and outreach about child safety, awareness and prevention. Located in neighborhoods throughout the county (Brandon, Central Tampa, North Tampa, Ruskin and Town & Country), FSRCs are staffed by neighborhood residents and provide support services to approximately 60,000 families annually.

*The Children's Board serves as the leading voice and advocate for children and families in our community. The board is the only organization of its kind in Hillsborough County that generates revenue to help children and families. The Children's Board is recognized nationally for its contributions to best practices in policies and programs aiding children and families. Citizens may visit [www.childrensboard.org](http://www.childrensboard.org) to learn more about the board's programs.*

## Preventable Child Death Facts in Hillsborough County

- Child abuse is NOT the leading cause of child deaths investigated by the Department of Children and Families.
- In Hillsborough County, the Department of Children and Families has investigated 257 child deaths since 2003. The number of deaths that were not due to natural causes amounted to 161.
- Of the 161 non-natural, child deaths in Hillsborough County since 2003, the total that were caused by drowning or unsafe sleeping practices issues totaled 93, or 58 percent. That means that almost 60 percent of the child abuse or neglect deaths in Hillsborough County are entirely preventable by following safe sleep practices and taking precautions such as securing pools and not co-sleeping with an infant.
- More than three elementary school classrooms of children have died during the past 6 years in Hillsborough County from preventable causes.
- The Florida Department of Health Quality Improvement reports that drowning (30.8%) and physical trauma (23.5%) were the leading causes of child deaths, followed by suffocation (12.9%) and vehicular death (12.4%).
- 86% (almost 9 out of every 10) of the 170 children who died from abuse or neglect were ages 5 or under.
- 103 deaths were accidental, 55 deaths were homicide (76% of those were ages 4 and under), 7 were undetermined and 5 were natural.
- Neglect may have no outward signs; for example: drowning, unsafe sleeping environment, children left in cars, medical neglect or abandoned babies.
- Drowning is the leading cause of death and is typically categorized as neglect.

## Top 10 States of Child Death by Maltreatment (2007)

1. Kentucky (4.08)
2. South Dakota (4.06)
3. **Florida (3.78)**
4. Nebraska (3.59)
5. Missouri (3.51)
6. Oklahoma (3.45)
7. Texas (3.44)
8. Indiana (3.34)
9. Ohio (3.27)
10. Nevada (3.18)

Risk factors include substance abuse, inexperienced caregivers, infant children (majority of deaths are from children under the age of 5), domestic violence, mental illness, economic instability (job loss, loss of daycare), criminal history, animal cruelty, excessive discipline.

In 2008, of the 17 deaths classified as being verified or having some indicator of abuse or neglect as to the cause of death, eight also had findings of substance misuse. That's right at 50 percent. Co-sleeping deaths are almost always paired with excessive alcohol or drug use.

**Sources:** *Department of Children and Families Suncoast Region*  
*Florida Department of Health Quality Improvement*