

PRESS RELEASE

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**Department of Children and Families Commissioner Allison Blake Visits
The Children's Home Society of New Jersey's Head Start/Early Head Start Program**



Commissioner Blake joins CHSofNJ Head Start students for story time. (Photo by Bill Drummer)

Trenton, NJ (December 26, 2014) – This month marks Governor Christie's fourth annual "Season of Service," a time when the governor and leaders of New Jersey State Departments volunteer their time to various community service efforts throughout the state. The Children's Home Society of New Jersey (CHSofNJ) was honored to host New Jersey Department of Children and Families (NJ DCF) Commissioner Allison Blake, Ph.D., and Assistant Commissioner, Family and Community Partnerships, Charmaine Thomas, as they visited the CHSofNJ Head Start/Early Head Start Center on Bellevue Avenue to read to children and meet with staff and parent volunteers.

CHSofNJ is Trenton's sole provider of center-based Head Start/Early Head Start and Early Head Start Home Based Services for 372 Trenton children from pregnancy to age five and their families. CHSofNJ also partners with the Trenton Board of Education, working with Monica Carmichael, Assistant Director for the Division of Early Childhood, to offer Abbott-enriched learning classrooms at three of the four CHSofNJ Head Start Centers, including Bellevue.

The CHSofNJ Head Start/Early Head Start Program ensures early child development and school readiness while strengthening families and reinforcing parents' confidence and ability to be their child's first and best teacher. Dr. Blake and her staff are strong supporters of continuous efforts to strengthen families and promote school readiness for children of low-income families through comprehensive early education, health, nutrition and social services. Taking part in CHSofNJ's Head Start/Early Head Start Programs was the perfect opportunity for the Commissioner to give back to a cause about which she is truly passionate. Following a tour of CHSofNJ's Head Start/Abbott Bellevue Center, Dr. Blake read *The Kindness Quilt* by Nancy Wallace, a story about kindness and selflessness, to the children attending the program. Commissioner Blake also sang with the children a rousing rendition of a holiday favorite, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*.

"Early education programs like Early Head Start and Head Start provide children a significant advantage," said Commissioner Blake. She continued, "Here at The Children's Home Society of New Jersey, children are being prepared for their first day of school. This is a wonderful educational opportunity that not only leads to improved academic achievement, but helps children go on to lead successful lives." NJ DCF's Division of Licensing assures all CHSofNJ Head Start/Early Head Start Centers are licensed in the state of New Jersey, under Director Antoinett Mehan.

Donna Pressma, President & CEO of CHSofNJ commented, "Without the dedicated and efficient work of Commissioner Blake's licensing team, it would not have been possible for us to open our Head Start/Early Head Start centers on time this year. We are very grateful to all of them."

"Our Head Start and Early Head Start Programs enable us to prepare children for school and academic success." Wendy Garrett, Executive Director of CHSofNJ's Head Start/Early Head Start Program explained. She continued, "These programs empower parents to play an active role in the education and development of their children, leading to a sense of pride and ownership in each child's success. Our success is building family support and offering children the strong educational foundation they need for their futures."

About The Children's Home Society of New Jersey

The Children's Home Society of New Jersey is a nonprofit child and family serving agency whose mission is to save children's lives and build healthy families. Founded in 1894, the agency protects abused or neglected infants and at-risk children by insuring stable, permanent, and loving homes for each and every child it serves. All services are confidential and most are free. For more information, visit our website at www.chsofnj.org.

About The Children's Home Society of New Jersey's Head Start/Early Head Start Program

The Children's Home Society of New Jersey's Head Start Program promotes school readiness for children by providing comprehensive educational, health, nutritional, and social services. Parents play a large role in the program, both as primary educators and as participants in administering the program locally. CHSofNJ's Early Head Start Program is offered in both Center-Based and Home-Based environments, and is designed to enhance children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development, assist pregnant women with prenatal and post-natal care, support parents efforts to fulfill their parental roles, and assist parents in moving toward self-sufficiency. Pregnant women and families with children (birth to age 5) that meet Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines, reside within the city of Trenton, or have children with disabilities and/or special needs may enroll in CHSofNJ's Head Start/Early Head Start Program. For more information, visit our website at www.chsofnj.org.

About The New Jersey Department of Children and Families

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) is dedicated to ensuring a better today and an even greater tomorrow for every individual the department serves. In partnership with New Jersey's communities, DCF ensures the safety, well-being, and success of New Jersey's children and families. DCF funds and directly provides services and support to over 100,000 women, children and families each month.