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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New law to help identify and address developmental and mental health challenges in children earlier

Legislation Requires Developmental and Social-Emotional Screenings in Child Health Exams

Chicago, IL – Child health advocates from Legal Council for Health Justice and a host of advocacy partners helped shape and pass a new law which will help families identify developmental delays or mental health concerns and seek interventions for their children sooner. State Sen. Kimberly Lightford (4th District) and State Rep. Camille Lilly (78th District) were chief sponsors of the legislation and instrumental to its passage.

“Not only will universal screenings benefit the both child and family, they will also help break stigma and increase awareness of the importance of early identification and intervention” says Amy Zimmerman, director of the Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children, one of three medical-legal partnerships at Legal Council for Health Justice.

Developmental and social and emotional screenings help to identify children’s needs, leading to earlier intervention where necessary and improved long-term health. From birth, all children reach milestones in how they play, learn, act, move, and interact with others. Developmental screenings help determine if children are reaching age-appropriate milestones. Additionally, mental health disorders are the most common health issue faced by children, with one in five children suffering from a mental health or learning challenge. Screenings will assist parents, health professionals, and schools to identify these concerns early and connect families to community-based or school supports, ensuring improved child health and ability to succeed in school and later life.

Signed by Gov. Bruce Rauner on Jan. 20, 2017, the legislation ([Public Act 99-0927](#)) adds developmental and social and emotional screenings to child health examinations for all children in Illinois. It requires the Department of Public Health, with the input of other key governmental agencies and stakeholders, to develop rules and appropriate revisions to the child health

examination form required when students begin licensed child care, preschool, kindergarten or first grade, as well as sixth, and ninth grades.

Federal and Illinois state agencies as well as the American Academy of Pediatrics have recognized the importance of screenings, viewing screening as both a vital prevention and family engagement tool. Screenings are also Medicaid-billable and part of Essential Health Benefits under the Affordable Care Act.

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***Legal Council for Health Justice** uses the power of the law to secure dignity, opportunity, and well-being for people facing barriers due to illness and disability. All programs partner with health and hospital systems to train and support the care provider network, provide direct representation to referred patients, and conduct systemic advocacy to promote health equity among populations facing chronic, disabling, and stigmatizing health and social conditions. www.legalcouncil.org*