



Press Release

October 15, 2009

ATTENTION: Reporters, Assignment desks

CONTACT: Anne Roberts, 405-236-5437

Statewide Child Advocates Gather, Legislative Agenda Set Longtime Director Bids Farewell

Edmond- The 2009 Fall Legislative Forum on Children's Issues concluded Wednesday with a progressive and focused agenda for Oklahoma's children.

"Now into our 26th year, OICA continues to be the voice for Oklahoma's children," said Anne Roberts, OICA Executive Director. "Through the efforts of this organization and all of the people gathered here, children's issues are brought to the forefront at the state capitol."

The two-day annual event provides a forum for child advocates from across the state to network, share information and find consensus on an agenda for state legislative action. The forum, held at the University of Central Oklahoma drew approximately 500 attendees and included a spirited discussion on children's issues from Oklahoma gubernatorial candidates.

"This year's forum exceeded our expectations," said Darryl Schmidt, OICA Board President. "People came from across the state to speak with one voice for our children and to honor Anne Roberts for her two decades of service to Oklahoma's kids."

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Roberts became Executive Director for the Institute in 1989 as the sole employee. Over the past 20 years, OICA's organization has grown and efforts at the State Capitol have resulted in substantial changes in the way Oklahoma treats its children.

- Funding has increased dramatically for programs to prevent child abuse, teen pregnancy, and domestic violence.
- Medical coverage has been expanded to cover thousands of additional children.
- The proceeds of the Tobacco Settlement were set aside in an endowment fund, with the interest dedicated to children's health needs.
- The child welfare and juvenile court systems have been reformed and strengthened.
- A physical education requirement has been reestablished in Oklahoma's public elementary schools to address the crisis of childhood obesity.

Roberts bid farewell to forum attendees and announced her departure to become Director of Legislative Affairs for Integris Healthcare.

Linda Terrell of Norman was named as the Institute's new executive director and will begin work in January of 2010. "I am very honored and excited to become a part of this incredible organization," said Terrell. "All of the people involved have forged the way of positive change for children and families across our state."

"The work continues," said Roberts. "The accomplishments of the past 26 years were a result of partnerships and working in collaboration with other advocates. I assure you, I will continue fighting for kids and will be OICA's most active and enthusiastic partner!"

The OICA 2010 legislative agenda is summarized below and the full agenda can be found at www.oica.org.

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2010 Legislative Agenda

Require Health Education

Require one semester of health education in grades 6, 7 or 8 in accordance with the PASS (Priority Academic Student Skills) guidelines. Topics of instruction should include, but not be limited to, physical activity, nutrition, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, behavioral health, oral health, environmental health, growth and development, injury prevention and wellness. Topics will be determined by each local school district.

Address the Needs of Children of Incarcerated Parents

Establish an Oklahoma Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents. Create an advisory council for children and families of incarcerated parents to facilitate collaboration to ensure such children receive appropriate services and supports to uphold these rights.

Prevent Youth Access to Tobacco

Support Tobacco Free Oklahoma to prevent youth access to tobacco by allowing stronger local ordinances and by making all public places and workplaces smoke free.

Address the Needs of Children with Autism

Continue to support proposals that will lead to health insurance coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of children and youth with autism spectrum disorders.

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