



## **Raising Hope for a Brighter Future: Flag Ceremony Highlights Fight Against Child Abuse**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Riverside County, California** The County of Riverside, Family Service Association (FSA) and the HOPE Collaborative will kick-off Child Abuse Prevention Month with a flag raising ceremony in memory of the young lives lost due to violence, abuse, and neglect.

On April 2, 2024, at 3:30 P.M., the second annual flag raising ceremony to honor children impacted by violence, abuse, and neglect will be held at Riverside County Administrative Center, located at 4080 Lemon Street in Riverside.

Featured speakers will include Second District Supervisor Karen Spiegel, Third District Supervisor Chuck Washington, Fifth District Supervisor Yxstian Gutierrez, District Attorney Mike Hestrin, Sheriff Chad Bianco, County Executive Officer Jeff Van Wagenen, Department of Public Social Services Director Charity Douglas, and Riverside University Health System's Chief of Medical Services Dr. Sophia Grant.

Building on the success of the inaugural ceremony, this year's event aims to further educate the community on recognizing the signs of abuse and neglect, while highlighting the collaborative efforts undertaken by various organizations to safeguard the well-being of children.

One in four children experience abuse or neglect in their lifetime. This abuse comes in many forms, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Early exposure to trauma can hinder development, which often leads to difficulties in learning, challenges forming healthy relationships, and poor coping abilities. The cycle of abuse can perpetuate through generations, emphasizing the crucial need for intervention and prevention efforts.

"The Riverside County Board of Supervisors remains committed to safeguarding our most vulnerable children," said Supervisor Karen Spiegel. "We stand united to ensure a comprehensive system of care is available to support children who have been subjected to the trauma of abuse and neglect and to provide ample services that will empower them to heal. It remains our fundamental responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves."

This year's ceremony will recognize the critical services provided by the Riverside County Child Assessment Team (RCAT) and the Sexual Assault and Forensic Evaluation Team (SAFE). RCAT is comprised of highly

trained medical professionals who conduct comprehensive medical evaluations when abuse and neglect are suspected. SAFE provides 24/7 forensic examinations and evidence collection for victims of sexual assault, guaranteeing children receive both necessary medical attention in a timely manner and the forensic support needed to prosecute offenders. These specialized units play a vital role in ensuring the well-being of children who have experienced abuse or trauma.

Protecting children requires a collective effort that transcends individual organizations. In Riverside County, Family Service Association (FSA) serves as the designated Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) known as the HOPE Collaborative. Stephanie Soto, Community Services Director, shared, "FSA strives to prevent child abuse, help families thrive, and build stronger communities. We partner with dozens of organizations to address the root causes of child maltreatment, such as poverty, lack of access to resources, and mental health issues. Through educational programs, awareness campaigns, and community outreach, we empower parents and caregivers with the knowledge and skills they need to raise healthy and happy children."

The HOPE Collaborative convenes monthly meetings in each supervisorial district in Riverside County and engages professionals, parents and volunteers. Dozens of representatives from child welfare, schools, law enforcement, probation, medical centers, children's advocates, and local faith-based agencies collaborate on the region's safety and wellbeing. "We encourage people from all backgrounds to volunteer with the HOPE Collaborative and attend our upcoming Flag Raising event with the County of Riverside on April 2<sup>nd</sup>," said Stephanie Soto.

For more information or to attend the flag raising ceremony, contact the HOPE Collaborative by calling 951-369-8036 or by visiting its website at [www.hopecollaborative.org](http://www.hopecollaborative.org).

If you have reason to believe that a child you know is experiencing abuse or neglect, report it immediately to law enforcement or to the local child welfare agency. Your voice may save a child's life. For further resources visit [www.hopecollaborative.org](http://www.hopecollaborative.org)

#### **About the County of Riverside:**

The County of Riverside has approximately 40 departments serving more than 2.4 million residents. Services ranging from public safety, health and human services, public works and community services, as well as budget and finance. The county serves approximately 1 million residents a year through its human services departments to ensure residents have critical resources and support.

#### **About Family Service Association:**

For 70 years, Family Service Association has addressed poverty, hunger, and health, from infancy to older adults, in families and under-served communities. Through early education, trauma-informed mental health services, obtainable senior housing, support for home-bound individuals, safe senior/community centers, and nutritious meals for older adults, FSA's team members serve over 13,000 community members each year. FSA also leads the County's Child Abuse Prevention Council, The HOPE Collaborative. FSA's motto is compelling, Family Strength Is Community Strength.

#### **About HOPE Collaborative:**

The HOPE Collaborative serves as Riverside County's Child Abuse Prevention Council. With a focus on interagency collaboration, community awareness, education, policy advocacy, and mandatory reporter

training, the HOPE collaborative works closely with law enforcement, school districts, non-profits, medical providers, mental health professionals, faith-based groups, community advocates, and the department of public and social services towards the prevention of child abuse and neglect in Riverside County.



## Child Abuse Awareness Month

# Flag Raising Ceremony

Join us for the second annual Flag Raising Ceremony as we come together to recognize the importance of community collaboration in strengthening and empowering families to prevent child abuse. Upon words from stakeholders across Riverside County, a special Flag Raising Ceremony will be held in remembrance of the children impacted by violence, abuse, and neglect.

<b>Tuesday</b> <b>April 2nd</b> <b>3:30 - 4:00 PM</b>	<b>Riverside County</b> <b>Administration Center</b> <b>4080 Lemon Street</b> <b>Riverside, CA 92501</b>
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**Please Wear Blue to Stand Against  
Child Abuse & Neglect**

Questions/Comments please contact Stephanie Soto at (951) 686-3750



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