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*PHOTOS ATTACHED

**WVCAN RECOGNIZES FOUR WEST VIRGINIANS FOR DEDICATION
TO HELPING CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED**

Awards presented at the 2016 WVCAN Conference

Charleston, WV -- On Wednesday, April 13th, four individuals from across the state were awarded by the West Virginia Child Advocacy Network (WVCAN) for their commitment to the Child Advocacy Center movement and the growth of WVCAN. Awards were presented during the One With Courage Awards Luncheon at the WVCAN 2016 Conference *Leaving a Legacy: Working Together Across Systems* at The Resort at Glade Springs in Daniels, WV.

Awardees included:

- Sgt. Melissa Clemons, Princeton – Professional With Courage Award
- Dr. James Kaplan, Charleston – Partner With Courage Award
- The Honorable Mary Ellen Griffith, Princeton – One With Courage Award
- Trudy Laurenson, Lewisburg – One With Courage Award

Sgt. Melissa Clemons is a recognized Multidisciplinary Investigative Team member who has demonstrated excellence in the collaborative approach to responding to child abuse in her community. She has made it her mission to protect and defend Mercer County's children for well over a decade. Well before she was appointed to the West Virginia State Police's Crimes Against Children Unit, Sgt. Clemons has been known as Mercer County's leading law enforcement expert on crimes against children.

Dr. Jim Kaplan, Deputy Chief Medical Examiner of West Virginia, has been an incredible ally to WVCAN and the work to help children heal from abuse. He has written and published academic articles, as well as presented to diverse audiences about abusive head trauma, child abuse, and sudden infant death syndrome. As West Virginia worked on child abuse medical response protocols in 2013, Dr. Kaplan took the lead in developing the protocol for the response to physical abuse. He has also participated on child abuse and domestic violence fatality review teams in multiple states throughout his career.

Judge Mary Ellen Griffith has been practicing law since 1991 and has spent many years focusing her work on children. She was part of a group of women who founded the movement to establish Child Advocacy Centers across the state. Her career highlights include establishing ChildLaw Services in 2001, the state's only practice designed to exclusively represent children. She has also served on the Citizen Review Panel for Child Protective Services, the Policy Workgroup on the Co-Occurrence of Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment, the Court Improvement Project Board of Directors and its Child Protection Across Systems Committee, where she currently serves as Chairperson.

Trudy Laurenson spent the last few years as a consultant for the West Virginia Child Advocacy Network, but has a lifetime history of service to victims of abuse. She was the Director of the domestic violence program serving the Greenbrier Valley for two decades. Then, after seeing a need for a Child Advocacy Center in her community, she created one and worked as the Director of the Child and Youth Advocacy Center in Lewisburg for six years. Trudy has been an instrumental force in the founding of WVCAN. She co-chaired the network through its most formative years, leading the group to establish by-laws, incorporate, gain membership with the National Children's Alliance, and obtain a line item in the state budget to support the work of Child Advocacy Centers all across the state.

The luncheon honored these four individuals' involvement in advancing the public conversation about child physical and sexual abuse. "We are honored to award Sgt. Clemons, Dr. Kaplan, Judge Griffith, and Trudy Laurenson today. We are grateful for their extraordinary commitment to victims of child abuse in our state," said Emily Chittenden-Laird, Executive Director of the West Virginia Child Advocacy Network.

For more information about the West Virginia Child Advocacy Network and the WVCAN 2016 Conference, please visit www.wvcn.org.

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West Virginia Child Advocacy Network (WVCAN) provides statewide leadership in the fight against child abuse while working side-by-side with the 20 Child Advocacy Centers throughout the state. WVCAN provides training, technical assistance, leadership, legislative and policy advocacy, and overall coordination to Child Advocacy Centers around the state. A CAC is a child-friendly facility in which child protection, criminal justice, and child treatment professionals work together to investigate abuse, hold offenders accountable, and help children heal. Rather than having a child taken from agency to agency to endure multiple interviews, the CAC model brings the system to the child for an effective, child-centered, healing process. As the statewide authority on multidisciplinary approaches to supporting child victims of abuse, WVCAN's purpose is to empower local communities to provide comprehensive, coordinated and compassionate services to victims of child abuse.