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**WEST VIRGINIA CHILD ADVOCACY NETWORK
CELEBRATES 10 YEARS**

Luminary Awards Presented to Four Champions for Children

Charleston, WV – The West Virginia Child Advocacy Network (WVCAN) held a 10-Year Celebration: *Be the Light* on Tuesday, April 4th at the Culture Center in Charleston. The evening celebrated the past decade of the Child Advocacy Center (CAC) movement in West Virginia and honored those who are part of it.

In what began as an informal networking group in 2006, WVCAN was formed as the state alliance of child advocacy centers and now has a membership of 20 nationally-accredited CACs. Over the past decade, the work of WVCAN and CACs have helped over 20,000 children that have made an outcry of abuse. Gathered at the celebration were team members from across the state, including CAC staff, treatment professionals, investigators, board members, volunteers, legislators, donors, and allies.

Four individuals and organizations from across the state were honored with “Luminary Awards” for their commitment to the CAC movement and the growth of WVCAN including the Sisters of St. Joseph Health and Wellness Foundation, the West Virginia Division of Justice and Community Services, Amy Landers, and the late Margaret “Peggy” Rossi.

The Sisters of St. Joseph Health and Wellness Foundation (SSJHWF) was established to address the health needs of West Virginians. The Foundation focuses its efforts on specific projects with the most promise to impact the long-term health of West Virginia’s children and has been funding Child Advocacy Centers as a priority focus area since 2004. SSJHWF is responsible for seed funding for most of the CACs and county expansion efforts over the last decade.

West Virginia Division of Justice and Community Services (DJCS) has been a long-term partner of WVCAN. DJCS has been the home for the state funding CACs receive since the funding’s inception in 2008 and has remained a strong collaborative partner over the last decade. Through this funding, WVCAN and CACs are able to ensure a comprehensive team response to allegations of child abuse, including facilitating investigation and healing services.

Amy Landers has devoted her professional life to advocate for the safety of women and children in West Virginia. Through a personal experience at a child advocacy center, Amy and her family were able to move toward hope and healing. The impact the child advocacy center made drove Amy to change career paths and begin advocating for victims. She currently works as the Training and Events Coordinator with the WV Coalition Against Domestic Violence where she is able to work with allied agencies, including WVCAN, to promote awareness and increase capacity of victim service providers across the state.

The late Margaret "Peggy" Rossi was the Executive Director of REACHH Family Resource Center. Peggy is being honored because of her dedication to the child advocacy center movement, having started the first CAC in the state at REACHH. She helped expand REACHH from an organization solely responsible for helping victims of domestic violence to one that also offers day care, family literacy training, and home visits. Peggy grew up in New York City, but dedicated her adult life to social service in Summers County. She is fondly remembered as a pioneer in the CAC movement by many to this day.

"The people in this room are all the reasons why I believe in hope and the compassionate, healing work that happens every day inside the child advocacy centers," stated Emily Chittenden-Laird, Executive Director of the West Virginia Child Advocacy Network. "I am grateful for the work they do, and tonight, it's about honoring them."

For more information about the West Virginia Child Advocacy Network, 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.