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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**WEST VIRGINIA CHILD ADVOCACY NETWORK  
ANNOUNCES TRANSITION OF LEADERSHIP**  
*Positioned for Continued Growth in Years Ahead*

Charleston, WV—West Virginia Child Advocacy Network (WVCAN), the statewide agency supporting the work of West Virginia Child Advocacy Centers (CACs), announces today that Kate Flack has been hired as its new Executive Director. Flack will succeed its founding Director, Emily Chittenden-Laird, who served in her role for over a decade.

“The things Emily was able to accomplish during her tenure as Executive Director were simply unimaginable 10 years ago. She took a tiny, underfunded organization with a big dream and turned it into a network that is a recognized leader in the CAC movement across the United States,” shared WVCAN Board President John Artimez. “It is not hyperbole to say that Emily has made a huge difference in the lives of thousands of children throughout West Virginia.”

Flack has a Master of Public Health degree from WVU and a professional background in advocacy and fund development. “When Kate speaks about the work of CACs, her compassion for victims, optimism for survivors, and enthusiasm for the CAC model and the promise it holds for WV, her commitment to our mission stands out,” Artimez said. “Our Board is firmly convinced that Kate will keep WVCAN on the upward path that Emily has established.”

Since its inception in 2006, more than 27,000 children have been served in the statewide network of child advocacy centers (CACs). A CAC is a child-friendly facility with staff that work to provide professional, compassionate care to alleged child abuse victims in order to reduce the trauma

often experienced by victims of abuse. 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. The CAC works within a multidisciplinary model that includes child protection, law enforcement, and other treatment professionals with the goal of facilitating healing for the child.

“We’re at a pivotal point in our state’s history,” stated incoming Executive Director Kate Flack. “West Virginia is on the front lines of the drug epidemic, with the highest rate of drug overdose deaths in the country (587.8 per 100,000 people – according to 2017 data collected by the CDC). During the last year, children served by West Virginia CACs were 6x more likely to be victims of drug endangerment than the national average. One in ten WV children will be a victim of sexual abuse – most at the hands of a trusted adult or guardian. Now, more than ever, we must step up as stewards of our state’s most precious, and vulnerable, resource – its children.”

Over the past decade, the network has grown from two to 21 CACs—with coverage now in 42 of West Virginia’s 55 counties. Recently announced, WVCAN will utilize funding from The BrickStreet Foundation and matching funds to encourage CAC service expansion to unserved communities in West Virginia. Plans are in place to officially serve every county within the next five years.

Once existing gaps are closed, no child in West Virginia will be more than one hour away from a child-friendly WVCAN member facility, and every center will have equal access to the support services WVCAN provides as centers work to increase their capacity to help more children and families in need.

Long-term Executive Director, Emily Chittenden-Laird, will be stepping down at the end of the year. “While I’m proud of the accomplishments of the past decade, I’m even more excited about what the next decade holds for our centers—there are big plans ahead,” said Chittenden-Laird. “But it’s those 27,000 children that move me most. They found strength in the darkest of moments to speak their truth and trust that there was hope on the other side.”

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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 21 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.