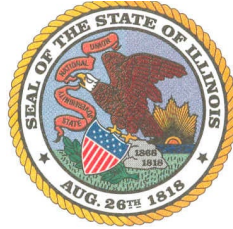


STATE OF ILLINOIS  
CIRCUIT COURT  
SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

JOHN S. LOWRY  
Chief Judge



WINNEBAGO COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
400 WEST STATE STREET, SUITE 215  
ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS 61101  
PHONE (815) 319-4806

April 15, 2024

**For Immediate Release**

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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**17<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Family Violence Coordinating Council Hosts  
“Hands Around the Courthouse” Community Awareness Event**

**ROCKFORD, IL** – April is Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month. Judge Jennifer Clifford, Chairperson of the 17th Judicial Circuit Court Family Violence Coordinating Council (FVCC), announces the return of “Hands Around the Courthouse” on April 18, 2024 at 12:00pm at the front entrance of the Winnebago County Criminal Justice Center located at 650 W. State Street in Rockford.

The community is encouraged to join the FVCC and their community partners, including Winnebago County CASA, Brightpoint, Youth Services Network, The Carrie Lynn Children’s Center and MERIT at this annual event. This brief ceremony will bring the community together to remember survivors and celebrate the work that has been done to improve the response to victims of child abuse and neglect.

This year’s event will honor the recipient of the inaugural Blue Bow Champion for Children Award, Mary Bawinkel. The Blue Bow Champion for Children Award is awarded to an individual, organization or group that has made outstanding contributions to child abuse awareness and prevention by going above and beyond to help kids grow up in safe environments. At the end of the event, participants will surround the courthouse with blue ribbon and plant a blue pinwheel garden to honor survivors of child abuse and neglect and increase awareness around prevention efforts. Remarks will be provided by Ericka Potter from Youth Services Network and Winnebago County Chairman, Joseph Chiarelli, will proclaim April as Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month. This event is open to the community.

According to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, close to 170,000 calls were made the Illinois Child Abuse Hotline in FY23. During the same time period, 217 children died by abuse and 178 children died by neglect in Illinois.

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