

**Contact:** John Tomlin 914-703-1655

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Resiliency Summit Aims to Keep Children of Northwest Arkansas Safe When Disaster Strikes**

### *Senator John Boozman Delivers Closing Remarks*

**FAYETTEVILLE, AR** (NOVEMBER 17, 2017) - As the nation reels from a devastating series of catastrophic events, leaders in Northwest Arkansas are taking a proactive approach to protecting vulnerable populations like children during major disasters. At a Friday afternoon summit organized by the Washington County Community Resilience Coalition, dozens of government, nonprofit, business, and community leaders gathered at the Hilton Garden Inn in Fayetteville to discuss strategies and best practices on how to keep kids safe before, during, and after natural or man-made disasters.

The Northwest Arkansas Resiliency Summit featured special remarks from US Senator John Boozman, Washington County Judge Joseph Wood, and video greetings from Congressman Steve Womack. It also included two panel discussions. The first brought together regional voices from Joplin, MO, Tulsa, OK, and Conway, AR to reflect on how their communities prepared for and responded to children's unique needs in disasters such as the Joplin Tornado of 2011, as well as how they supported broader community recovery efforts. The second panel featured Washington County Community Resilience Coalition members from local government and local child-serving institutions like the Donald W. Reynolds Boys and Girls Club of Fayetteville.

"We've seen the real-life impact of natural disasters in recent months when hurricanes made landfall in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. We also saw it with the wildfires out west. The devastation in the wake of events like these is often most visible in the youngest members of the impacted community—its children. And while the worst of Mother Nature brings out the best of the human spirit, when outside help ends, the resiliency of a community truly is incumbent upon those who live where a disaster strikes. That's why events like this summit are so important. The best practices shared here will help our communities, and in particular, the most vulnerable of members of them, recover in the aftermath of a disaster," commented United States Senator John Boozman.

"The Northwest Arkansas Community Resilience Leadership Summit represents an opportunity to celebrate the good work that has already taken place to enhance the visibility of the unique needs of children and families in emergency situations. The Summit also provided a forum for discussion that hopefully inspired those who attended to consider what additional efforts can be made in Northwest Arkansas to ensure the needs of children and families are considered in emergency planning and response" said Congressman Steve Womack.

-more-

Children are considered one of the most vulnerable populations in a disaster as they are often unable to advocate for themselves and depend on a variety of community institutions and services. Disruptions to these systems – such as those caused by disasters - can cause long-term setbacks to a child’s development particularly in relation to physical health, mental health, and educational advancement. Child-centric disaster planning can enable communities to bounce back quickly after a major catastrophic event so that children and other vulnerable populations can reestablish a sense of normalcy as soon as possible and prevent negative long term impacts.

“Washington County is setting a new standard for meeting the needs of children in a disaster and connecting the child-focused Community Resilience Coalition with national legislators at this summit is a great example of their forward-thinking approach,” remarked Jeff Schlegelmilch, Project Director of the Resilient Children / Resilient Communities Initiative (RCRC) and Deputy Director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness. “Good policy and legislation starts with community engagement, and community resilience occurs within the context of good policy and legislation.”

John Luther, Director of Emergency Management in Washington County said “Emergency Management’s role is to encourage the community to be resilient and prepared. Working with schools and child care facilities before a disaster means that we can help them build plans, partnerships and make sure that we are all ready to serve our youngest residents.”

The Community Resilience Leadership Summit was organized as part of the RCRC Initiative led by the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University’s Earth Institute, in partnership with Save the Children and funded by a grant from the biopharmaceutical and healthcare company, GSK. For the last two years, the leaders of this initiative have worked with a cross-section of Washington County stakeholders to design a model to improve the ability of child-serving institutions (like schools and child care centers) to bounce back after any emergency or disaster.

Two years ago the RCRC Initiative assembled the Washington County Community Resilience Coalition - comprised of organizations such as Child Care Aware of Northwest Arkansas, government agencies including the Washington County Department of Emergency Management and over 30 other local partners – as a vehicle to engage communities in child-focused disaster planning and to foster better communication among the various stakeholders. The Coalition meets regularly to assess preparedness gaps, craft policy and discuss different tactics to keep children safe in disasters.

“When it comes to protecting our children before, during and after a disaster, it takes the entire community,” said Debbie Malone, Community Coordinator for Child Care Aware of Northwest Arkansas. “All of us have a role to play, and I am thrilled that we had so many community leaders join us today to keep the dialogue and work going.”

For more information visit the RCRC Initiative Homepage: <http://ncdp.columbia.edu/rcrc> and the local CRC homepage: <http://www.nwachildcare.org/resilient-children-resilient-communities.html>

###