



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 7, 2019

Contact: Laura Baker
(o) 803-734-0153 / (c) 803-521-9116
lbaker@scfirststeps.org

**SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF HELPING
CHILDREN TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN SCHOOL AND LIFE**

Columbia, S.C.— South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness, South Carolina’s only statewide, dedicated early-childhood agency, is celebrating 20 years of service to children and families on Tuesday, September 10. The celebration begins on the State House steps at 5 p.m. with remarks by former Governor James Hodges and a group photo of more than 300 supporters from across 46 counties. A reception for the group will follow at 6 p.m. at Optus Bank, 1241 Main Street, Suite 100, Columbia.

Dignitaries attending will include Gov. Hodges and former Representative James Smith, who worked to establish First Steps as a statewide public-private partnership charged with getting South Carolina’s children ready for success in school and life on June 28, 1999. Two decades later, First Steps continues to lead the charge to ensure South Carolina’s youngest citizens reach their highest potential.

“It is such an honor to celebrate the work of so many dedicated community leaders, partners, staff and board members who have made SC First Steps the life-changing organization that it is today,” says SC First Steps Executive Director Georgia Mjartan. “It is amazing to realize that the lives of more than a million children and parents have been impacted by First Steps over the past twenty years.”

Over the past 20 years, 726,817 children have been reached through First Steps, which is both a state agency and a 501(c)3 nonprofit. Services are offered through a network of 46 First Steps nonprofit affiliates, one in each county, which provide parenting support, increase access to high-quality child care and offer a variety of other evidence-based programs. Through First Steps 4K,

14,495 children have participated in free, high-quality, full-day, 4-year-old kindergarten in private, nonprofit and faith-based centers. First Steps is also the convener of the South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council that works to ensure integration and collaboration across governmental agencies serving young children.

###

About SC First Steps

South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness (SCFS) is both a nonprofit and state agency and is the **only statewide, dedicated comprehensive early childhood agency** in South Carolina focused on getting children ages birth through five ready for school and life success. First Steps serves more than 30,000 children in 81 school districts across 46 counties.

At its core, SC First Steps is a children and family first organization. Its work to support the success of all children from birth through age five by serving families, their communities and early childhood education providers.

Established in 1999 by the South Carolina General Assembly to close the gap on students' preparedness for success in school, South Carolina First Steps takes a holistic approach to accomplishing its mission of preparing all children for success in school, work and life, offering services that improve children's health, strengthen families, expand access to quality child care, increase participation in four-year-old kindergarten programs and help transition rising kindergartners into school.