

For Immediate Release
July 25, 2014

Contact: Cheryl Deep 313-664-2607
cheryldeep@wayne.edu

Michigan Lt. Governor Visits Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute

DETROIT -- Lt. Gov. Brian Calley learned about key areas of research conducted at the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child & Family Development during a July 23 visit. As chair of a bipartisan commission on mental health and wellness, Calley has worked to address gaps in the delivery of mental health services and to strengthen the delivery of mental health services in Michigan. Faculty at the institute shared research they are doing that is consistent with the Commission's goals. Institute's research programs included infant mental health, computerized interventions to decrease alcohol and drug use in pregnant mothers, and increasing the use of mental health services in cases of child sexual abuse.

"We need to look at brain health in the same way we look at physical health," he said. "We need more integration and coordination of mental health services." Calley's 2013 commission report calls for better access to mental health services across the state, and more measurements and metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of the services provided.

Ann Stacks, Ph.D., who directs the Institute's Infant Mental Health Program, outlined the Wayne Baby Court project, which is a collaborative effort among child welfare, legal, and mental health systems to support optimal developmental outcomes for infants and toddlers in the child welfare system. The Baby Court approach includes infant mental health services for families and cross-disciplinary training for attorneys, DHS workers and infant mental health specialists. Dr. Stacks shared preliminary results from the program that show reductions in developmental delays and improvement in parent-child interactions.

Hilary Ratner, Ph.D., acting director of Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, organized the "Breaking Down Barriers: Translating Science into Solutions" presentation. "We are delighted that Lt. Gov. Calley could visit our Institute to learn more about who we are, what we do, and how we can contribute to the State in the areas of child and family mental health and early childhood education," she said.

The lieutenant governor also learned about Institute research on treating stigma and mental health in active duty military families. His father had an army career, and his brother is a Marine, so he understands some of the challenges that can exist for military families seeking mental health services. Deane Aikins, Ph.D., co-principal investigator of the study with Julie Aikins, Ph.D., who is jointly appointed with the School of Medicine, said resistance to treatment is beginning to soften as families understand how their own mental health impacts their children's development.

Calley applauded the Institute's expansive community outreach program and strong reputation. Healthier Urban Families trained more than 8,000 parents, children and professionals last year in issues ranging from autism to safe use of social media. "When that many parents and organizations are finding you primarily through word-of-mouth, that's a very good sign," he said.

Calley ended his visit with a tour of MPSI's Early Childhood Center which serves about 60 children age 2 ½ to 5, and partners with the Early Childhood Center in the College of Education. Both are directed by Anna Miller and highly accredited. The Centers created a consortium of preschools along the Woodward corridor to provide professional development trainings, sharing of best practices, and alignment with newer quality requirements from the state. Improving the quality and availability of early education has been a top priority for Gov. Snyder since taking office in 2011.

"This was a special opportunity to showcase the relevance of Merrill Palmer Skillman and Wayne State University to solving problems that people care about," Ratner said. "Our experts are available to help the state of Michigan in any way possible."

***The Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child & Family Development** promotes and improves the development, health and well-being of infants, children, youth and their families through research, education and outreach. The institute is part of **Wayne State University**, a premier urban research institution offering more than 370 academic programs through 13 schools and colleges to nearly 29,000 students.*