

COUNCIL FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES in Greater Cleveland

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Police Chief Calvin Williams and the Council for Economic Opportunities launch *Friendship through Reading*

CLEVELAND – October 3, 2016 - Reading regularly to a child is one of the most important things you can do during his or her formative years. Keeping a community's children safe as they continue to grow and develop is dependent upon communication and trust between children, families and a neighborhood's police officers. These are the key reasons **the Council for Economic Opportunities and city of Cleveland Police Chief Calvin Williams are launching the *Friendship through Reading* program that will begin to take place in Head Start centers across Cuyahoga County this month.**

"It's definitely about reading, but it's also about police-community relations with our own folks," said Cleveland Police Chief Calvin Williams.

The *Friendship through Reading* program will assist the Cleveland Police Department as it strives to build a stronger, more positive relationship with the children and families in the community through interaction and open communication.

"Our Head Start families enroll because they want to give their children the best chance at achieving their dreams," said Dr. Jacklyn Chisholm, president and CEO of the Council for Economic Opportunities in Greater Cleveland. "An important part of this is growing up in a safe, nurturing and friendly community."

The idea was formed when the Council invited Chief Williams to read to students at William Patrick Day Head Start Center for the first day of school. He read two books: *If You Take a Mouse to School* and his personal pick *Llama Llama Red Pajama*. The students were captivated by his reading and asked him questions about being a police officer. A four-year-old asked the Chief his name. "My name is Calvin, what's yours?" The special connection was instant.

Police officers will read the popular children's book *If You Take a Mouse to School* by Laura Numeroff or will read a favorite childhood story of their own. They can also choose from the Council's Head Start Top 20 children's books selected by Dr. Thea Wilson, vice president of Head Start. By the end of the calendar year, officers will have read to all 14 of the Council's Head Start centers. The reading list, pictures and more can be found at ceogc.org/friendship-through-reading/.

The mission of the members of the Cleveland Division of Police is to enhance the quality of life, strengthen our neighborhoods and deliver superior services with professionalism, respect, integrity, dedication and excellence by working in partnership with our neighborhoods and community.

The Council for Economic Opportunities in Greater Cleveland is a nonprofit organization and the designated Community Action Agency for Cuyahoga County and the largest high-quality Head Start program in Ohio that operates programs and services dedicated to transforming the lives of residents. The Council delivers early childhood education, personal and professional development programs and support services to residents of Cuyahoga County. Programs include Early Head Start (birth to three) Head Start (three – five years of age); individual assessments for classes and coaching sessions on topics including parenting, anger management and life skills; and professional development: job readiness, customer service training and job placement. The Council also delivers the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). For more information, visit ceogc.org.

The Head Start program is a commitment to give every child an opportunity to succeed in school and in life. In the 50 years since its inception in Cuyahoga County, Head Start has improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and their families. The program teaches basic concepts in math, literacy and social skills preparing children for Kindergarten and beyond. The Council operates 14 high quality Head Start locations and serves more than 2,500 children and families. Additional information about Head Start locations and more is at ceogc.org.

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