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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Department of Human Services Awards Teens for Creativity
in Celebrating Favorite Memories
*Annual Teen Media Contest Expands in 2017***

TRENTON – May 17, 2017 – The Department of Human Services (DHS) today honored 14 New Jersey high school and middle school students at an event hosted by its Division of Family Development. The students were honored for their winning entries in the 2017 Teen Media Contest, which celebrated the students’ artistic portrayal of a favorite weekend memory with their family.

The contest uses the topic of family to engage high school and middle school students in creative thinking through art and the written word. Students, under the guidance of their school’s art and writing/language faculty, created original hand-made and digital/computer-generated artwork, as well as written works that reflect the contest theme and the Department’s ongoing advertising and outreach campaign: “*Child Support. It’s more than just money.*” Winners were chosen based upon their interpretation of the year’s theme, with the winning art and written pieces and a select number of “honorable mention” pieces featured in the annual Child Support calendar published every year. Last year’s winners and honorable mentions can be viewed [online](#).

“We are continually amazed at the caliber of the artwork entries we receive each year for the contest. In 2017, we wanted to tap into other areas of the arts and writing in order to capitalize on the talent and creativity of our state’s middle and high school students,” said DHS Acting Commissioner Elizabeth Connolly. “Whether it was a piece of artwork, a digital photo or even rap lyrics, this year’s winning works clearly show the imagination, ingenuity and enthusiasm of the students in demonstrating how their families enjoy one another.”

New for 2017 was the addition of written work and digital/computer-generated artwork categories to the established handmade artwork. These new categories allowed a new segment of students statewide to participate in the contest and led to a surge in contest entries. The theme gave the students the chance to show the good times they have had with their family, despite any rough and challenging times they have faced.

“The slogan for New Jersey’s child support program is ‘Child Support. It’s more than just money.’ This contest is one of the other ways that we support families and offer young people an opportunity to think about family life in a different way,” said Natasha Johnson, Division of Family Development Director.

Winners in the *high school* artwork category:

- First place, Sharina Kuo, Cherry Hill School West
- Second place, Jackson Giesin, Piscataway Township High School
- Third place, Corey Hallam, Union County Vocational Technical High School

Winners in the *middle school* artwork category:

- First place, Lydia Yang, Schuler Colfax Middle School
- Second place, Tanya Aravind, Academy 1 Middle School
- Third place, Fajrhafza Sohail, Academy 1 Middle School

Winners in the *high school* computer generated category:

- First place, Gisselle Criollo, Piscataway Township High School
- Second place, Kiyomi Sutton, Piscataway Township High School

Winners in the *high school* written category:

- First place, Stephanie Padilla, Kenmare High School
- Second place, Brittany Richardson, Point Pleasant Beach High School
- Third place, Jude Lovgren, Point Pleasant Beach High School

Winners in the *middle school* written category:

- First place, Meghan Lepsis, Olson Middle School
- Second place, Harsh Patel, Morris County School of Technology
- Third place, Julie Ham, Churchill Junior High School

In addition to having their artwork featured in the 2018 calendar, each winner receives a plaque of achievement, an American Express gift card, and a pair of day passes to Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson, New Jersey. All winning entries will be displayed in the Statehouse Annex Tunnel from May 22-24.

For more information about this program or the New Jersey Office of Child Support Services, please call **1-877-NJKIDS1** or go to www.njchildsupport.org.

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