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### **Massachusetts' First Lady Lauren Baker Reads Aloud to Young Children at Boston Medical Center in Support of Reach Out and Read Early Literacy Program**

**Boston (February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016)** -- Pediatricians at Boston Medical Center (BMC) are sending families home from checkups with free books and a very important prescription – “read aloud to your children every day.” Today, Massachusetts’ First Lady Lauren Baker visited BMC not only to cheer them on but also to practice what doctors preach by reading to a group of young patients.

Nearly 27 years ago, Boston City Hospital (now BMC) pediatricians founded Reach Out and Read to give young children a foundation for success by integrating children's books into pediatric care and encouraging families to read aloud together. Throughout the years, our understanding of the importance of parents and caregivers reading aloud to, and engaging with, their young children has grown, and Reach Out and Read has spread nationwide to more than 5,500 clinical sites.

At regular checkups from infancy through five years of age, trained doctors and nurse practitioners speak with parents about the importance of reading aloud and every child receives a new, carefully chosen book to take home.

Through Reach Out and Read, each child starts kindergarten with a home library of up to 10 books and a parent who has heard at every health supervision visit about the importance of reading to their young children.

The program has gained broad support on Beacon Hill and bipartisan support in Congress, which authorized federal funding for pediatric early literacy promotion for the first time in the Every Student Succeeds Act, passed in December 2015.

“Some of our family’s fondest memories are from reading aloud each night together,” said Massachusetts First Lady Lauren Baker. “Reading early and often to our children during their formative years is important to both their development and future success. I encourage all families to take part as much as they can and applaud Boston Medical Center for their role in founding and expanding this incredible program.”

Currently, there are 301 medical sites participating in Massachusetts’ Reach Out and Read program, which serves over 196,455 children annually and distributed more than 340,030 books last year.

Results from a recent Scholastic survey underscored the need for this type of initiative. At a time when the achievement gap is growing wider, and when more than a third of American children start school without the skills necessary for learning, the survey showed that less than half of the families in the U.S. read aloud to their children every day.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has recognized the important role that pediatric providers play in encouraging parents and caregivers to read aloud to their children and the program has one of the strongest records of research support of any primary care intervention. Parents who have participated in the Reach Out and Read program are four times more likely to read to their children and include more children’s books in their home, and children served by the program are three to six months ahead of their non-Reach Out and Read peers on vocabulary tests.

“Research shows that if you intervene in the first five years of life and partner with parents, you can dramatically improve the early literacy skills of a child, putting them on the track for success in school and in life,” said Reach Out and Read Executive Director Brian Gallagher. “Childhood development experts tell us that the most important thing that parents can do to give their children a foundation for success is to read aloud to them every day.”

At a cost of only \$100 per child for the full five years, Reach Out and Read serves more than 4.5 million children in the U.S. annually, over half of whom are from low-income families.

“Our physicians are committed to helping our patients and families using innovative approaches to care, including initiatives like Reach Out and Read that are aimed at building a foundation for future success,” said Bob Vinci, MD, chief of pediatrics at BMC. “We are extremely proud of our historical ties to Reach Out and Read and look forward to our continued collaboration.”

*For more information, visit [www.reachoutandread.org](http://www.reachoutandread.org).*

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#### About Boston Medical Center

Boston Medical Center is a private, not-for-profit, 496-bed, academic medical center that is the primary teaching affiliate of Boston University School of Medicine. It is the largest and busiest provider of trauma and emergency services in New England. It offers specialized care for complex health problems and is a leading research institution, receiving more than \$119 million in sponsored research funding in fiscal year 2015. In 1997, BMC founded Boston Medical Center Health Plan, Inc., now one of the top ranked Medicaid MCOs in the country, as a non-profit managed care organization serving Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Boston Medical Center and Boston University School of Medicine are partners in the Boston HealthNet – 13 community health centers focused on providing exceptional health care to residents of Boston. For more information, please visit <http://www.bmc.org>.