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**Longtime Children's Museum CEO Announces Retirement**

*Julia Bland to step down effective June 4 after more than 2 decades of leadership*

**NEW ORLEANS** -- Following more than 24 years of service to the Louisiana Children's Museum, Chief Executive Officer Julia Bland has announced her retirement, which at Bland's request, will take effect on June 4. With Bland's departure, under a plan previously developed with the museum's executive committee, Chief Operating Officer Lauren Clay will be appointed interim Chief Executive Officer.

According to Board President Colleen Levy, "Our Board of Directors and the entire museum community are deeply grateful for Julia's vision, energy, and leadership over so many years. During her tenure, and in concert with the Board and staff the Louisiana Children's Museum has seen unprecedented growth, progress, and stability. Julia has made a lasting mark on the museum and has helped position this flagship learning and cultural center to be an even greater contributor to the public good for many years to come."

The museum Board will be conducting a national and local search as it seeks to replace Bland with a permanent Chief Executive Officer.

"My nearly 30-year involvement with the museum has given me the opportunity to be in the midst of true magic – observing young children as they think and learn and play and develop," CEO Julia Bland shared. "The museum has been on a very intentional journey to elevate the way our community values young children, invests in them, and then reaps rewards as we strengthen families and build a more hopeful quality of life. The numerous community partnerships that have been forged over the years, as well as the generous citizens who support our many efforts, together with passionate and talented staff have provided deep and meaningful foundational roots for our large family. My time at LCM has been filled with pride as we have made many, many joyous connections."

Bland joined the museum in 1998 when the facility was located in New Orleans' warehouse district. Following Hurricane Katrina, Bland, the board, and numerous community partners collaborated to reimagine the museum's mission and vision to better serve and address the needs of young children and their families across the region.

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One of Bland's lasting contributions to both the museum and the region was guiding the facility's relocation from its limited quarters to a world class setting in City Park, where numerous new programs and educational opportunities have been made available for even more patrons and the community at-large. Since its 2019 reopening, the museum has emerged as a nationally and internationally recognized institution for its focus on early learning, mental health support for children and parents, and its learning framework that promotes early literacy, early learning and play, sustainability, and sound water management.

According to former museum board member Allison Stouse, "Julia's positive impact at the museum and in the larger community reaches far and wide. Perhaps her most profound contribution, though, has been her extraordinary vision for a beautiful, healthy and dynamic place where the potential of each child is valued, supported and made manifest every day. The Louisiana Children's Museum in City Park is that vision realized, and thanks to Julia, it will benefit generations of children and families to come."

Notably, Bland helped direct the museum through the devastation and uncertainty of Hurricane Katrina and more recently, the immense challenges posed by COVID-19. Other hallmarks of Bland's tenure with the museum include establishing the local Campaign for Grade Level Reading, impactful outreach programs in local schools and childcare centers focused on the healing power of play and literacy, and other program innovations including creating a partnership with the Tulane institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health.

Over the course of Bland's tenure, museum attendance and membership have soared. Today, the museum has more than 4,700 members and expects to host over 250,000 children and their families this year.

Board President Levy notes that "This leadership transition has been contemplated and discussed by the museum's executive committee for some time now and we are fully prepared for the next chapter of service to the community to begin. We are confident that through the dedication and focus of our amazing staff, the museum will continue to excel in its important mission and seamlessly provide unique and valuable experiences for young people from the area and all around the world as they visit New Orleans. We are excited to continue the museum's legacy through new leadership."

During her time with the Louisiana Children's Museum, Bland's leadership was recognized by numerous national museum organizations as evidenced by appointments to the National Museum and Library Services Board and to the Association of Children's Museums Board for which she served as President. In 2015, the museum received the Institute of Museum and Library Services National Medal from First Lady Michelle Obama, as well as the Colin and Alma Powell Legacy Award for the museum's role in creating the New Orleans Kids Partnership. In 2013 Bland organized a first-ever museum trip to Reggio Emilia, Italy, to study the world-renowned infant and toddler centers through a weeklong Study Tour.

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