**For Immediate Release**

Contact:

Name

YMCA

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**Illinois YMCAs Launch Safety Now – Skills for Life Drowning Prevention Program**

The Illinois State Alliance of YMCAs is happy to announce an initiative to provide drowning prevention curriculum to 4,500 youth free of charge. The insert YMCA name will be offering programs insert dates as part of this initiative. The Safety Now-Skills for Life initiative is funded through a Congressionally Directed Spending allocation in the amount of $400,000 initiated by Senator Tammy Duckworth. Funds for this Congressionally Directed Spending Initiative is administered through the Department of Education. 100% of this program will be financed with these funds*.*

“Our state and nation are stronger when we invest in our communities and families—and that’s one of the things Congressionally Directed Spending allows us to do,” Duckworth said. “I’m proud I was able to secure support for projects across our state, including for the Illinois State Alliance of YMCAs’ Safety Now-Skills for Life initiative. With this federal investment, YMCAs across Illinois will now be able to offer drowning prevention classes at no cost, keeping thousands of children and young adults safe.”

The Safety Now – Skills for Life drowning prevention initiative will be offered at YMCAs throughout the state of Illinois. Its goal is to reach children at risk of drowning and teach them basic water safety skills through a standardized program to include:

* Exercises to help kids adjust to being in the water
* Instruction in two skill sets kids can use if they unexpectedly find themselves in the water: 1) Jump, Push, Turn, Grab and 2) Swim, Float, Swim.
* Safety topics like what to do if you see someone in the water who needs help
* Fun activities that reinforce skills

Drowning poses a considerable risk for youth, especially those from underserved populations. The statistics are sobering, but drowning deaths are preventable. The YMCA believes everyone should have the chance to learn how to stay safe around water because:

1. Learning to be safe around water is a life skill. Today, fewer than half of all Americans say they know how to swim. The Safety Now-Skills for Life initiative is designed to help change this reality.

2. Learning to be safe around water builds a sense of achievement in youth. Overcoming a fear of water and mastering skills in the pool builds confidence and competence.

Every year in our country, approximately 900 children die from drowning, and thousands more are hospitalized as a result of non-fatal drownings. Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury for 5- to 14-year-old youth and disproportionally affects children of color, with 64% of African American and 45% of Hispanic/Latino children being unable to swim, compared to 40% of Caucasian children. Accidental drowning accounted for approximately 90 percent of total U.S. deaths reported in children with autism ages 14 and younger. Most drownings in Illinois happen in natural water or swimming pools. Sadly, 20 children in Illinois tragically lost their lives to drowning in 2023. Many more lives may have been impacted, but there is no concise data available for ‘near drowning’ incidents in Illinois.

Insert specific YMCA information, registration info., program contact info., etc.

Because most of these tragic deaths are preventable, drowning prevention is a national priority of YMCA of the USA. The Illinois State Alliance of YMCAs is excited to offer the Safety Now – Skills for life drowning prevention initiative at YMCAs throughout the state and provide youth with the skills and confidence they need to be safe around water.

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Insert 1-2 sentence description of your YMCA, mission, values