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**Parents, Youth, Service Providers, Advocates, and Elected Officials Call
on Mayor to Ensure Budget Cuts Do Not Jeopardize Child Safety**
Advocates Observe Child Abuse Prevention Month

April 7, 2009 – Parents, youth, service providers, advocates and elected officials warned Tuesday that steep budget cuts to the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) in the Mayor’s Preliminary Budget could jeopardize the safety of children across New York City.

Unlike the city’s four uniform agencies, Police, Fire, Corrections and Sanitation, ACS was held to a 7% reduction in city funds, which equals over \$50 million in city reductions, and well more than that with the loss of state and federal matching funds. “ACS is the city’s emergency responder for the well-being of children. Sadly, this city already knows the tragedies that befall us when the city’s child welfare agency does not have sufficient resources,” said **Jennifer March-Joly, Executive Director of Citizens’ Committee for Children**. “We must not let the budget deficit leave children at risk.”

The budget proposes a 5% rate reduction to foster care agencies providing services to children removed from their homes and their parents as well as a 10% reduction to the foster parent support program for foster parents caring for adolescents. The budget also proposes to eliminate funding that lowers caseloads at community-based preventive service programs, which enable children to remain safely in their homes. Furthermore, the budget proposes to reduce ACS staff by almost 1000, including over 550 layoffs, which will result in the elimination of the Office of Family Visiting and the Office of Youth Development.

“We cannot cut vital services for children and simply hope for the best. Preventive services are crucial in the fight against the serious problems of child abuse and neglect. In tough economic times the priority of government should be first and foremost to protect our City’s children,” said **Councilmember Bill de Blasio**.

“The preliminary budget ignores the hard data. Reports of abuse and neglect remain high, more children are being found to have been abused or neglected, and more families than ever are receiving preventive services, which have been shown to prevent more costly foster care,” said **Jim Purcell, the CEO of the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA)**, an umbrella organization for the city’s foster care and preventive providers. “Cutting back on these services at the time when more families need them does not make any sense, especially given that preventive services will save the city money.”

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The impact of the dramatic staff reduction at ACS is yet to be fully understood because it is not yet clear what functions ACS will be eliminating; however, the Office of Family Visiting and the Office of Youth Development are slated for elimination. "The loss of programs which created meaningful visits for children and parents separated by foster care plus the cuts to the preventive programs translates into more disruptions for children and far more expense for foster care," said **Sue Jacobs, the Executive Director of the Center for Family Representation.**

These deep cuts to ACS and its partner agencies will likely lead to more children at risk, fewer services for families and more children in foster care for longer lengths of time. "Cuts to preventive services and diminished support to youth and families in foster care will result in a deeper and more dangerous crisis going forward by driving greater numbers of needy children and families into the homeless system, the penal system and the foster care system itself," said **Karen Freedman, Executive Director of Lawyers for Children.**

"The proposed cuts to vital services for children and families will work against the goals of keeping families together in their communities whenever possible, ensuring the rights of children to safe treatment, and expediting permanency for children who experience foster care," said **Tamara Steckler, Attorney in Charge of the Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Practice.** Legal Aid Society attorneys represent more than 22,000 children every year in child welfare and related family court proceedings.

Press Conference Co-Sponsors: Citizens' Committee for Children (CCC); Children's Defense Fund-NY (CDF-NY); Council of Family and Child Care Agencies (COFCCA); Lawyers for Children; Neighborhood Family Services Coalition (NFSC); United Neighborhood Houses (UNH).