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**Councilmember de Blasio and over 100 Parents, Youth, Providers and Advocates Rally Against City Budget Proposals That Threaten Child Safety**

*June 4, 2009* – Parents, youth, service providers, advocates and elected officials warned Tuesday that steep budget cuts to preventive service programs, foster care agencies and ACS could jeopardize the safety of children across New York City.

"Three years ago, after a terrible string of child fatalities, we stood here on these same steps and called on the City to ensure that ACS and its providers had the resources needed to keep children safe-- and the Mayor and the City Council ensured the resources were available. Now we stand here on the brink of budget cuts that will chip away at the progress that has been made. We do not want to have to come back here after a senseless tragedy and ask for these resources," said **Jennifer March-Joly, Executive Director of Citizens' Committee for Children.**

"We cannot play Russian Roulette with the safety of our children. Eliminating 1,000 positions at the Administration for Children's Services, and reducing funding for preventive service programs is a risk we cannot afford to take. Times are tough all over, but gutting programs that protect children is not the answer," said **Council Member Bill de Blasio.**

These deep cuts to ACS's provider 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 Foster Care are unconscionable. Children will suffer more and stay in foster care longer," 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.

The budget proposes a 5% rate reduction, which translates into a \$7.4 million cut, to the city's 35 foster care agencies caring for the almost 17,000 foster children. The budget also cuts \$1 million for supports for foster parents caring for teens.

"The proposed 5% cut to the foster care agency administrative rate is not a cut to paperclips-- this funding is for staff and services and will therefore translate into reductions in staff, increased caseloads, delays in services to children and families and then to longer lengths of stay in foster care. These abused and neglected children and youth are literally in the custody of the City- so the City must not cut the services that protect their safety and well-being. These children deserve a permanent family connection without delay," said **Richard Altman, CEO of the Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA).**

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The budget also proposes to eliminate funding for the Child Safety Initiative, which lowers caseloads at the community-based preventive service programs that help strengthen families so that children can remain safely in their homes. This initiative costs the city \$4.2 million, but also receives 2/3 reimbursement from the state, making the total loss almost \$12 million.

“The failure to restore the caseload reduction funds undermines the critical improvements that have been made to child safety, as well as the confidence the community has developed in the ability for preventive service programs to keep children safe and with their families. Without the funds needed to support lower caseloads through the Child Safety Initiative our ability to perform safety assessments, make frequent home visits, ensure families receive counseling, tutoring and parenting education and support, and provide the quality of work rightfully demanded of us, will be seriously compromised,” said **Charles Barrios, Division Director of Brooklyn Preventive Service Programs at Good Shepherd Services.**