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Scorecard on the 2008-09 Budget

Wins and Losses for New York's Most Vulnerable

Earlier this week, the New York State Legislature and Governor David Paterson came to agreement on the 2008-09 New York State budget. While much of the public response has focused on overall revenues and spending, the content of that budget makes a profound statement about our government's priorities. The public should ask a basic question: Did New York's leaders provide for our most vulnerable citizens in a difficult budget year?

"We think Governor Paterson and the Legislature did a reasonably good job on behalf of the State's most vulnerable citizens, especially given the large budget deficit," says SCAA President and CEO Karen Schimke. "But there were some big gaps that need to be filled next year."

New York's leaders protected our most vulnerable citizens in the following ways:

Health: Expanding the Children's Health Insurance Program to families making up to 400% of the federal poverty level. Research has repeatedly demonstrated raising the eligibility level for public program encourages more low-income individuals to apply. Thousands of additional children will receive important health care services because of this expansion.

Health: Raising the tobacco tax. This is an important public health intervention that will encourage more people to quit smoking and chewing tobacco, reduce health care costs and improve the health of New Yorkers.

Education: Increasing aid to public schools by \$1.8 billion and continuing the Contract for Excellence to ensure that the additional funding is devoted to improving educational outcomes.

Pre-kindergarten and child care: Expanding support for universal pre-kindergarten services, which will enable providers to serve another 30,000 children.

Pre-kindergarten and child care: Moving child care funding to the Child Care Block Grant, a dedicated fund that will ensure that child care dollars are spent on child care.

Social services: Increasing the state's commitment to child welfare services to localities by \$167.7 million. These funds support important child welfare services, adoption subsidies, and Home and Community-Based Waiver Programs.

Social services: Allowing youth who are aging out of foster care to receive Medicaid until they reach 21 years of age.

Social services: Closing four juvenile justice facilities and investing some of the savings in community-based alternatives to incarceration that better address troubled children's needs.

Social services: Maintaining the 50% partnership with counties in funding public assistance and juvenile detention.

Social services: Doubling the child support pass-through to \$100 per month, which will aid thousands of low-income children.

New York's leaders missed out on opportunities to help vulnerable citizens in the following ways:

Social services: Failing to raise the basic public assistance grant for the 19th year in a row. As the cost of living rises, the monthly grant to needy recipients of public assistance declines in real value a little more each year.

Health: Deleting funds for the State Office For the Aging's proposal for targeted home care services to prevent nursing home institutionalization.

Health: Dropping additional funding for smoking cessation programs through the Department of Health. These programs help many New Yorkers quit smoking every year.

Education: Failing to improve financial aid for foster youth attending college, or for part-time college students.

“We urge New York's leaders to get started right away on next year's budget, so that our state can provide assistance to the many low-income and disenfranchised citizens suffering from the downturn in the state's economy,” added Schimke.

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