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Children's Advocates React to Proposed Budget Cuts to Home Visiting

Albany—Children's advocates strongly objected today to Governor Paterson's proposal to cut the Healthy Families New York home visiting program by 25% and eliminate funding for home visiting through child welfare preventive spending.

Home visiting programs work with families in their homes by providing direct services or assessing need, connecting families with appropriate services, and monitoring ongoing well-being. Investments in these programs have been shown to reduce incidents of child abuse, as well as costs associated with foster care placements, hospitalizations and emergency room visits, and other costly interventions.

An elimination of home visiting programs means children will become at greater risk for abuse and even death. Parents will not receive education to strengthen parenting skills, support to help them raise healthy children, or referrals to other social service programs.

Said Karen Schimke, President & CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, "Last week SCAA released three budget priorities that all state leaders should find reasonable. First, protect programs that serve vulnerable New Yorkers. Second, protect "seed corn" investments essential to the state's future prosperity. Third, give special consideration to programs that can show evidence of successful outcomes. Today, the Executive Budget violated all three of these priorities."

Home visiting programs decrease child abuse and neglect, which generally increase in stressful times such as economic downturns. Over four decades of research by the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program show that its home visiting services cut child abuse nearly in half. The elimination of child welfare preventive spending dollars that partially fund NFP means that programs in New York City and in Monroe and Onondaga Counties will cease serving an estimated 1,200 families.

Following the 8% budget cut of Healthy Families New York in August, about 500 families lost services. A 25% cut will decimate programs and devastate families.

“We are already hearing reports of an increase in child abuse in this recession. Parents are stressed-out and some end up taking out their frustrations on their children. How many children will be hurt or killed without preventive programs in place?” asked Chris Deyss, Executive director of Prevent Child Abuse New York.

Several organizations oppose the cuts, including the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, Prevent Child Abuse New York, Nurse-Family Partnership Replication—Public/Private Ventures, Winning Beginning NY, and the New York Children’s Action Committee (CAN) 0-5 Subcommittee.

“In his address earlier today, the Governor voiced his openness to ‘corrections or advice’. We would be pleased to discuss with him the impact these proposed cuts would have on children and families,” Ms. Schimke stated.