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*New Jersey Receives Praise for Efforts to Safely Reduce the Need for Foster Care
Casey Family Programs' hosts event to highlight child abuse prevention strategies*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – New Jersey Department of Children and Families' (DCF) Commissioner Kimberly Ricketts participated in a journalist roundtable in the nation's capital today hosted by Casey Family Programs' - which focused on effective strategies to safely reduce the need for foster care and highlighted jurisdictions, like New Jersey, that have demonstrated success in that effort.

"I am pleased by the progress New Jersey has made on behalf of children and families throughout our state," said Governor Corzine. "We will continue to increase our reform efforts to ensure that every child has a good home, a bright future, and a healthy mindset."

"We are so grateful for Casey Family Program' efforts to shine a light on the need for child abuse prevention and family support services nationally - and thank them for recognizing the great work here in New Jersey," Commissioner Ricketts said at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. "Thanks to the commitment and dedication of Governor Jon S. Corzine, we have been able to make unprecedented strides in developing services for vulnerable children and families all across the state."

Since 2006, New Jersey has been able to successfully and safely reduce the number of children in out-of-home placement by more than 25 percent - from over 11,000 children in 2006 to just 8,300 children by the end of September 2009. Commissioner Ricketts was one of four child welfare leaders invited to participate in the roundtable event, along with representatives from Philadelphia, Georgia and Florida.

"A growing number of child welfare systems across the country are turning to prevention as a way to safely reduce the need for foster care. The New Jersey Department of Children and Families is among the leaders in this movement that strengthens families and keeps children safe. As an innovator in child welfare that is committed to safety, New Jersey has a powerful story to tell," said Cari DeSantis, executive vice president of Casey Family Programs.

During the event, Casey Family Programs highlighted a variety of effective prevention strategies including home visiting programs, family support centers, family residential substance abuse treatment programs, differential response and family teaming.

New Jersey has been unique in the nation due to Governor Corzine and the state Legislature's commitment to maintain services that prevent child abuse and support vulnerable families. That commitment has led to a continuum of new and expanded

services in the past few years that was highlighted by Casey Family Programs today, including the:

- Development of 37 publicly-supported Family Success Centers - neighborhood-based centers that have provided vital services to over 50,000 families since 2007;
- Expansion of three evidence-based home visitation programs statewide, now serving 2,500 families at any given time in all 21 counties;
- Creation of the Differential Response Pilot Initiative to engage families when they are in need of social services and before child abuse or neglect is an issue - currently launched in six pilot counties (Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem Counties in 2007 and Middlesex and Union Counties in 2009) and has served over 2,100 families to date;
- Support for 227 school-based youth services programs that provide nearly 130,000 students annually with services ranging from mental health services and substance abuse counseling to employment services and pregnancy prevention programs;
- Expansion of substance abuse treatment services for parents and adolescents involved with the child welfare system, in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Human Services, that targeted programs specifically for fathers and their children, as well as services that provide treatment for parents with both substance abuse and mental health issues; and
- Implementation of a new case practice model for child welfare staff that focuses on empowering families rather than exercising power over them and training caseworkers on family teaming strategies.

Commissioner Ricketts was joined by representatives from a local New Jersey service provider Children's Home Society of New Jersey - Donna Pressma, executive director, and Martiza Raimundi-Petroski, director of family support services, Latino outreach and parenting education programs. Both Pressma and Raimundi-Petroski offered real-life stories of the families their organization serves each and every day. The Children's Home Society of New Jersey offers a wide range of family and child services, including two Family Success Centers in Trenton, N.J.

This is the second time this year New Jersey has been recognized by Casey Family Programs for the state's work to improve child welfare. The national non-profit organization recently launched the Raise Me Up campaign here in September, making New Jersey the second jurisdiction to benefit from the powerful campaign to get the public involved in supporting children in foster care.

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