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**Parents, Child Welfare Agencies, Advocates, and Elected Officials
Call for Funding to Fill Budget Gap in Child Abuse Prevention Services**
Advocates Observe Child Abuse Prevention Month

April 2, 2007 – Parents, advocates and elected officials warned Monday that a funding gap in the city's Preliminary Budget will lead to cuts in child abuse prevention services, jeopardizing the safety of children across New York City.

"Preventing child abuse by helping and supporting families is one of the most important and hardest tasks of a child welfare system working to reform itself," said Violet Rittenhour, Parent Organizer, Child Welfare Organizing Project. "Availability and access to preventive services is the key to real system reform."

New York City has experienced a 30% increase in reports of child abuse and neglect over the past year, putting preventive service programs at more than 100% capacity. Yet the city's Preliminary Budget for fiscal year 2008 does not include funding to maintain staff needed to support families and keep children safe.

"The Preliminary Budget for 2008 ignores the hard data—reports of abuse and neglect have increased by 30 % in the last year and ACS found an unprecedented 26,595 families with children who were abused or neglected," said Gail Nayowith, Executive Director, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. "Yet, preventive service agencies can only serve half this number of families at any one time. Despite widespread acknowledgment of the link between lower caseloads and keeping children safe at home, this essential funding is absent from the budget."

"When preventive services are at 100% utilization, we know that there are families and children out there who we could be serving, but aren't," said Council Member Bill de Blasio (D-Brooklyn). "Prevention is just as important as child protective services, which is why we need new funding to ensure that we can reduce caseload ratios so caseworkers have ample time to spend visiting and working with families."

According to advocates and service providers, \$6.7 million in funding, which is absent from the 2008 Preliminary Budget, is desperately needed just to deal with the current caseload—and additional money is needed to expand preventive services to meet increased demand.

(MORE)

“Our Preventive Services programs avert foster care and assure the safety of children remaining in homes threatened by domestic violence, substance abuse, severe mental illness and sexual abuse. For these caseworkers to assure the safety and well-being of New York City’s most vulnerable children they must have manageable caseloads. The crisis in the numbers of children needing the protection of Preventive Programs is currently straining the system so programs must also be expanded to accommodate the increasing numbers of children at high risk of abuse,” said Jim Purcell, Executive Director, Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies.

"There is no doubt that a failure to fill the projected funding gap by July will have a devastating impact on preventive programs’ ability to meet the needs of families,” said Lilliam Barrios-Paoli, Executive Director of Safe Space. “As record numbers of families are coming to programs for help, the city must ensure that needed funding is invested to support the expansion of preventive services in 2008.”