



For Immediate Release:

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

Media Contacts:

Hector Soto, (212) 697-2323 x 103, hsoto@cdfny.org

Erin Davis, (212) 697-2323 x 107, edavis@cdfny.org

CHILDREN NOT A PRIORITY IN THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET ADDRESS

The budget proposed by Governor Pataki ignores the reality that the state of New York's children is not good and is only getting worse. Today more than 925,000, or more than 20 percent of the state's children, live in poverty with 480,000 living in extreme poverty – at less than half of the poverty level. This means that these families had to get by on less than \$7,412 a year, or \$20 a day.

In addition, New York has 469,000 children without health insurance, 80 percent of whom come from working families. Of the uninsured children, 70 percent are already eligible for public health insurance but are not enrolled. During 2004, the rate of New York households that were inadequately fed rose to 14.5 percent from 12.9 percent and the percentage of low-income households that have used a soup kitchen doubled to 39 percent. Additionally, in 2004, 634,658 children received food stamps with only 53 percent of all eligible for the program participating.

Donna Lawrence, the Executive Director of the Children's Defense Fund – New York says the Governor's priorities are misplaced: **“Clearly, the state of New York's children is not good and calls for courageous leadership and comprehensive measures. The budget presented by the Governor this week, though long on tax cuts, is short on initiatives that will effectively begin to address the growing poverty and other conditions that are plaguing too many of New York's most vulnerable children. The horrific death of Nixzmary Brown underscores the need for New York to make preventive investments and provide supports for its most at-risk children *before* they suffer family breakdown, get sick, into trouble or become the victims of abuse and neglect.”** she said.

With the exception of a handful of small efforts, the Governor's budget did not provide for any new, bold, or expansive initiatives that will address the most serious problems faced by the state's most vulnerable children and families. If anything, some of the Governor's proposals may make matters worse. For example, the Governor's proposal to sanction children for the actions of their parents who are public assistance recipients unfairly penalizes children and will contribute to New York's rising rate of child poverty. Similarly, the Governor's proposal to increase funding for the Flexible Fund for Family Services, while promising county flexibility, eliminates the funding guarantees for child care and other supports for New York's most at-risk families.

The Children's Defense Fund – New York urges state legislators to put children and their families front and center when reviewing the Governor's \$110.7 billion dollar budget proposal and deciding how to allocate the \$2 billion surplus.

“Now is the time to enhance our public health insurance programs and their enrollment and retention procedures to assure that every eligible child in New York has health insurance coverage and is able to see a doctor when sick. Now is the time to expand supports for working families, like childcare, food stamps, child nutrition programs and the Earned Income Tax Credit that help working families and their children meet their basic needs, and transition out of poverty. Now is the time to examine our child welfare and foster care systems, and provide the resources necessary to guarantee that there will be no more tragedies like that of Nixzmary Brown,” continued Donna Lawrence.

###

The mission of CDF is to Leave No Child Behind®. CDF provides a strong, effective voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. CDF pays particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, into trouble, drop out of school or suffer family breakdown. CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations. CDF has never taken government funds.