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Children's Leadership Council Launches "Invest in Children, Strengthen America" Campaign

*National Coalition Calls for Greater Investments in Children and Youth to Help Prepare Them
for School, Work and Life*

Washington, DC – The Children's Leadership Council (CLC) launched its "Invest in Children, Strengthen America" campaign today in Washington, DC. The CLC is a coalition of child advocates representing 35 leading national policy and advocacy organizations, with members in every state in the nation. The national launch follows a week of state events in 9 states.

These groups are working everyday to improve the health, education and well-being of children and youth in order to prepare them for school, work, and life. For the first time there is a strong, unified group of organizations speaking with one voice to achieve a singular mission – build the public awareness and create the political will necessary to make greater federal investments in America's children and youth a reality.

"When we invest in children, we strengthen America. By making all of our children – from birth to young adulthood – a priority, we secure our nation's future. Investments in quality health care, early childhood education and other programs will bring millions of children out of poverty and go a long way toward providing real solutions to our short- and long-term economic challenges," said Bill Bentley, President and CEO of Voices for America's and founding member of the Children's Leadership Council.

The CLC is calling on President-Elect Obama and Members of Congress to commit to specific economic recovery measures and long-term investments that can help keep more children and youth from falling into poverty. With 78 percent of Americans affected by the current economic crisis, children deserve to be at the forefront of economic investment and relief.

"It's so incredibly important that we pool our efforts and the advocacy organizations' resources, both in terms of funds and people power, to make sure we speak with one voice on behalf of children in the United States," said U.S. Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL-20). "We've got to think about the fact that everything we're doing now is going to be what our children inherit. With this economic downturn, as it has been oft repeated, this generation of children is potentially at risk for being the first generation of Americans not better off than the generation in front of them."

U.S. Representative Jim Moran (VA-8) added, "The principle focus in the last couple of months, since the election, has been on investment in our physical infrastructure; that will create jobs and that will bring out economy back much sooner than would otherwise have been the case. We understand, and the Children's Leadership Council is underscoring the point that there needs to be a parallel investment in our human infrastructure. That too has been neglected over the past 8 years."

"Problems like teen pregnancy, school dropouts, drugs, and gangs are all interrelated, because the solution to each of those problems, and the best cost-effective solution, is primary prevention. When you solve one, you actually solve

them all.” said U.S. Representative Bobby Scott (VA-3), building on Representative Moran’s point that “the first five years are the most critical, and that is where we’ve shown the most neglect.”

The “Invest in Children, Strengthen America” campaign focuses on five specific areas of investment that are proven effective in improving the health, education and well-being of children across America. Those five investment areas for children and youth are:

- The prevention, early diagnosis and treatment for at-risk children, including those who are abused and neglected.
- Services for older children to ensure that they are safe and on a path to success such as those that reduce high school drop outs, mentoring for at risk youth and job training.
- Physical, dental and mental health care, prevention and treatment so that all children are healthy.
- Programs that provide early development and learning, such as child care, Head Start/Early Head Start and other early childhood programs for children from birth to age five.
- Support for families to help make them economically stronger, more stable and more self-sufficient including programs such as expanded child tax credits, child support, increases in food stamps/SNAP, child nutrition programs and rental assistance. Strong families mean strong children.

“As a parent of four former Head Start children, I cannot stress enough the importance of fully-funding infant, child, and youth programs and initiatives, especially when so many families are facing economic challenges,” said Almeta Keys, Executive Director of the Edward C. Mazique Parent Child Center. “Head Start has been an extremely successful program since its inception in the 1960's and it proves how investing in children yields very real results for our country, our economy and our children.”

“Our children and youth cannot afford to wait any longer—they need us to invest in them now,” said Charles Kolb, President of the Committee for Economic Development. “It is time our leaders make choices that better prepare America’s children and youth for school, work and life. It is not just the right thing to do; it is one of the smartest investments we can make for our nation’s future.”

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