



For Immediate Release

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**National Expert Discusses Strategies to Improve the
Life Chances of Youth in State Care**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

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PROVIDENCE, RI – Gary J. Stangler, a nationally recognized leader in child welfare and co-author of *On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System*, will speak at a policy roundtable at the Statehouse on **Wednesday, April 4, 2007** at **11:00 a.m.** in the Senate Lounge, located on the second floor. Mr. Stangler is the Executive Director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, a national effort launched in May 2001 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs to help youth in foster care make successful transitions to adulthood. The policy roundtable is sponsored by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, Casey Family Services and the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, began the policy roundtable by highlighting the importance of improving outcomes for all children, especially those most vulnerable children entrusted to the care of the state. Ms. Bryant noted, "Learning to live independently is a lifelong process and for most children this development is continuously supported in a family setting. For youth who are in the care and custody of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), the state has the responsibility to ensure that they have the housing, education and support services they need to make successful transitions to adulthood."

Bill Bentley, President and CEO of Voices for America's Children, a nonpartisan, national organization committed to speaking out for the well-being of children at the federal, state and local levels of government, commented on the cost-benefit of providing services to older youth in care,

“Rhode Island has been a national leader in developing innovative and effective programs to meet the needs of vulnerable and at-risk children. It is our hope that the General Assembly will continue that leadership by reversing these cuts so young people in state care will have the supports they need to successfully navigate a pathway to responsible adulthood.”

Referencing the proposed cuts to services for approximately 857 youth in state care, Ms. Bryant added, “It is in the best interest of the state for young people in the care of DCYF to succeed and become productive citizens. Research from other states has shown that youth who age out of foster care without the proper supports are at greater risk for depression, homelessness, pregnancy and poverty. If we don’t provide a support system for these youth now, the costs to the state will be much greater down the road.”

Mr. Stangler presented information on the poor outcomes for youth in state care as they age out of state care without permanent connections to supportive adults. “Many older youth who ‘age out’ of foster care when they turn 18 struggle to stay in school, find stable housing, support themselves financially and get medical care. Very few kids in this country have even finished high school by age 18. Considering our job done with an 18-year-old who has not graduated from high school should be unthinkable.”

In Rhode Island between federal Fiscal Years 1998 and 2006, 646 youth aged out of foster care without having been placed with a permanent family. In FY 2006, youth aging out represented 7% of all exits from out-of-home placement for Rhode Island children. James Gannaway, Director of the Rhode Island Division of Casey Family Services, noted, “It is clear that we as a state need to do a better job of moving children into permanent families so that as young adults they are supported by family connections. Yet in this moment, there is a great urgency to continue to provide services and supports to the young adults for whom we have failed to find permanent homes.”

Several youth in state care and Lisa Guillette, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association, described how the proposed budget cuts will impact the lives of Rhode Island youth in foster care. The policy roundtable provided an opportunity for legislators and key stakeholders to discuss national best practices to meet the needs of this group of vulnerable youth in ways that are cost-effective. Youth in state care who receive more training and

services, have real work experiences and have positive and permanent support systems prior to exiting care, experience better outcomes after exiting the foster care system.

The roundtable participants noted that there has been a decrease in federal support for children and youth in state care. A child today is only eligible for federal foster care support (Title IV-E) if the family from which the child is removed would have been eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children in 1996. The income standard has not been adjusted for inflation, resulting in fewer children eligible for federal foster care support each year. As a result, the percentage of children eligible for federal foster care support in Rhode Island has decreased from 29% in 1998 to 17% in 2004. It is anticipated that in each subsequent year Rhode Island will continue to lose ground in terms of federal funding. Participants pledged to work with Rhode Island's Congressional Delegation to increase federal funding for these critical services.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the economic well-being, health, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.

Prior to joining the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Gary J. Stangler served as the director of Missouri's Department of Social Services for eleven years. He has also served on the board of the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) from 1994-1998 and, on several occasions, testified before Congress on foster care, indigent health care, and family preservation. Mr. Stangler also serves on the boards of The Finance Project and the Center for the Study of Social Policy, is a fellow with the Center for Family and Policy Research at the University of Missouri - Columbia, and has received numerous awards, including the Lewis Hine Award for service to children. Mr. Stangler is author of a number of articles in professional journals and publications in the United States and Europe, and co-author of On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System.