



## New York State Community Action Association

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### Press Release



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### *Over 100 Organizations Call on the Governor and Legislature to Address Poverty in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

(Albany, NY)– The New York State Community Action Association (NYSCAA), the Fiscal Policy Institute and New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness held a press conference today to call on Governor Spitzer and the New York State Legislature to establish a Statewide Commission on Economic Security and Poverty. The groups garnered over 100 organizational endorsements from around the state supporting their request.

NYSCAA's Board President, Gordon Hazel, said that a state commission on economic security would create the impetus to address poverty and offer opportunity to those who need it most. He said, "There is a tradition in America, an idea that there is an unseen but powerful connectedness among us. When tragedy befalls us, we all feel it. We rise together to meet adversity. Now is the time to address the tragedy of American children growing up in poverty."

With the federal poverty level set at \$20,000 for a family of four, the US Census Bureau estimates that **2.76 million New Yorkers lived below the federal poverty level in 2005**. Of these, **923,000 were children**. Many of the families are working families for whom low wages make it a struggle just to make ends meet; education and training to prepare for better jobs remain elusive. Supporters of the new commission said that all New Yorkers would benefit from better understanding of prudent investment strategies that help low income families move ahead and achieve their full potential.

"We believe that New York State can and should give working families the opportunity to move into the middle class," stated Denise Harlow, NYSCAA CEO. "New York cannot afford to bypass this opportunity to address poverty and economic security statewide." Harlow pointed to the momentum created by the Commission for Economic Opportunity in New York City and by various movements nationally to address poverty on a broad scale. "Now is the time for the Empire State to step forward to lead," she said.

The Fiscal Policy Institute has been working to foster policy discussions about improving the upstate economy and creating greater avenues to the middle class for low-wage workers. FPI's senior economist, Dr. Trudi Renwick, said, "When the majority of our upstate cities struggle with poverty rates that hover around 30 percent, we can no longer sit back and expect the economy to improve itself. We must examine the reasons we have such high concentrations of people living in poverty in our cities, and develop policies that will provide them with the assistance they need to climb the socio-economic ladder."

The groups noted that all state agencies should be involved in this commission, since poverty directly relates to the work that they do. Ron Deutsch, executive director of New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness, stressed the multiple facets of poverty in New York. "The faces of poverty across the state are as diverse as the state's population itself," he said. "Whether we are talking about inner city residents, or seniors living in rural areas, or children struggling in the suburbs, poverty is merciless and knows no pity. The time has come to have a statewide dialogue on how to help improve the lives of so many of our fellow New Yorkers."

### **Why is 2007 the Right Time for the Statewide Commission?**

- New York State has the eleventh highest poverty rate in the country (14.7 percent).
- 2.76 million New Yorkers including 923,000 children live below the federal poverty level.
- 1.5 million New York City residents (19.1 percent) live below the poverty line.
- More than half of the residents of the Bronx, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo have incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- More than 10 percent of the residents living in the Bronx, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo live in extreme poverty with incomes less than 50 percent of the federal poverty level.
- African American (21.6 percent) and Hispanic (25.3 percent) New Yorkers are disproportionately represented amongst those living in poverty.
- We can do something about it and the time is right for New York State to take a studied approach to the issue.

The groups called on New York's elected officials to convene a commission that could work over the summer and fall to provide the governor with informed policy proposals for the state's 2008-2009 executive budget.

*NYSCAA ([www.nyscaaonline.org](http://www.nyscaaonline.org)) is a member organization and represents the fifty-two Community Action Agencies in New York State serving all sixty-two counties. For more than 40 years, New York's Community Action Agencies have been the proven local, grassroots, federally-designated network of anti-poverty agencies in New York State.*

*The Fiscal Policy Institute ([www.fiscalpolicy.org](http://www.fiscalpolicy.org)) is a nonpartisan research and education organization that focuses on tax, budget, and economic issues that affect the quality of life and the economic well being of New York State residents.*

*New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness ([www.abetterchoiceforny.org](http://www.abetterchoiceforny.org)) is a coalition of faith-based, labor, human services and grassroots organizations across the state. NYFF is the lead agency for the Better Choice Budget Campaign, committed to investing in the future of New York by making smart revenue and budget balancing choices rather than through massive spending cuts.*