

MEDIA RELEASE

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Advocates call for Early Learning Commission *Say Coordination, Oversight Needed*

Albany, NY (December 12, 2006)—A coalition of early care and education advocates is calling on Governor-elect Spitzer to form an Early Learning Commission overseeing New York State's early childhood programs and services.

Winning Beginning NY, the state's leading early care and learning advocacy coalition, cites the need for coordination and oversight of the state's programs as a key rationale for the Commission.

"The commission is needed to galvanize support for expanded and coherent investment in high quality early childhood services for New York State," said Karen Schimke, a Winning Beginning NY Co-Convener and President/CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis & Advocacy.

The state has made progress in recent years toward developing early learning services for New York's youth, said Schimke, adding, "Launching an Early Learning Commission is the key next step to ensuring both that we make the most of every dollar invested."

Under the plan presented today by the coalition, the chief goal of the Early Learning Commission is to make sure all early childhood programs are of the highest quality. "We need to align public investment with quality improvements to help every child excel — in other words, we need to replace the current patchwork with a

seamless, more effective approach to early childhood services,” said Carol Saginaw, a Winning Beginning NY Co-Convener and Executive Director of the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council.

Under the proposed plan, the new Early Learning Commission will work across state agencies to galvanize support and resources, and better manage existing publicly-funded early learning activities. The Commission would make key policy recommendations to the Governor and Legislature about ways to better coordinate the state’s efforts.

“The plan we propose follows similar models successfully implemented in Georgia, North Carolina, and Massachusetts, but, of course, is tailored to fit New York State’s needs and policy environment,” said Nancy Kolben, a Winning Beginning Co-Convener and Executive Director, Child Care, Inc.

The coalition believes the first priority for the Early Learning Commission is to reach across the usual state agency boundaries, address duplicative and conflicting regulations, and align funding, oversight, and regulation. “In short,” said Ms. Kolben, “It must do what’s necessary to realize the Regents’ vision that every child, beginning at birth — no matter the background, language, or special need — gets a healthy start and has the skills necessary for success in today’s global economy.”

The coalition’s call to the governor-elect is supported by a child advocates statewide, many of whom provided statements of support for the coalitions efforts. One such supporter is George Askew, MD, Executive Director of Docs for Tots.

“It is clear that investing in our young children will give them a chance to thrive and indeed be an investment in New York's future. An Early Learning Commission will ensure that sound, meaningful policy is put in place to offer New York’s children the start that they deserve,” said Dr. Askew.

Education and political leaders also back the call for the Early Learning Commission. Billy Easton, Executive Director of the Alliance for Quality Education, spoke at Tuesday's event, linking it to the need for comprehensive planning.

"Day 1 of the Spitzer Administration is only 20 days away. On Day 1 we all anticipate that New York State will no longer deny young children access to quality pre-k. Eliot Spitzer has set the bar at no less than educational excellence. Pre-k is but one part of the comprehensive multiyear plan he has articulated to invest \$8.5 billion statewide to equip our children to succeed from pre-k through college."

Albany County Executive Michael Breslin spoke on the need to streamline the state's approach to children and family services.

"As County Executive I struggle all the time with duplicative and conflicting regulations in dealing with children and family services. An Early Learning Commission would bring about better coordination, reduce waste, and encourage transparency and accountability at all levels of New York government."

Patrick Hogan, Group Family Day Care Provider, Dee's Tots Child Care, Westchester County, spoke to the role of the Commission in leading industry reform:

"By improving the conditions for Child Care providers, we will improve the quality of care for children we serve. Providers need a voice in the regulatory process, to be recognized and paid as the professionals that they are."

In its presentation to state leaders, the coalition said that members of the newly formed commission should include representatives from state agencies with key early learning responsibilities, such as the State Education Department, the Office of Children and Family Services, and Department of Health. In addition, they said, the commission should include legislative staff, early care and education experts, and

advocates, parents, business, labor and higher education leaders and others with a keen interest in seeing that every child gets off to a good start.

Winning Beginning NY is an early care and education coalition representing more than 60 organizations. It's committed to quality early learning opportunities for all children, beginning at birth. Originally formed as New York's chief prekindergarten advocate, it was reestablished in 2006 via the linkage of the Child Care That *Works* campaign with the PreK Coalition.

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