



For Immediate Release

April 28, 2010

Contact: Sarah Jimenez (916) 443-1749 or (916) 224-7623
Mike Roth (916) 444-7170 or (916) 813-1554

**“Take a Foster Youth to the Capitol” Day
Pairs Abused and Neglected Children and Youth
with Lawmakers whose Decisions Shape their Lives**

Governor’s \$133 million veto is severely affecting the lives of abused and neglected children

Sacramento – More than 100 foster youth from across the state journeyed to the Capitol today to share their stories of how the Governor’s \$133 million veto to Child Welfare Services has severely affected their lives and their chances at a better future. More than two dozen of the foster youth had the opportunity to shadow a legislator for the day and tell the Capitol’s decision makers why it is critical that funding be restored for programs that help keep abused and neglected children safe and help youth transition into independence. At the same time, the youth gained an up-close look at the legislative process, hoping to use what they learned to advocate for full funding and support of Child Welfare Services to improve the lives of their fellow foster children and youth.

“While Governor Schwarzenegger’s veto of child welfare funding has a small impact in state budget terms, it has a devastating impact on the safety and success of California’s foster children and youth. Foster youth came to the Capitol from all parts of California to deliver an important message: family reunifications are on hold, child abuse investigations aren’t happening quickly, the search for permanent homes is delayed, court hearings are delayed, we have fewer foster families, and there’s no support for youth transitioning to adulthood. All this spells disaster for vulnerable children,” said Frank Mecca, Executive Director of the California Welfare Directors Association.

During the day, legislators joined foster youth at a press conference kickoff, before 26 youth were matched up with legislators who volunteered to host a foster youth for the day. Youth sat in on hearings and meetings with legislators, and learned about the legislative process with the hopes of using that knowledge to improve the lives of their fellow foster children and youth, and advocate for full funding and support of Child Welfare Services.

“It’s important that legislators hear directly from us – foster youth – so they understand that their decisions impact our lives every day, in significant ways,” said Tanashati Anderson, 17, of San Francisco. “Like all children and youth, foster youth deserve the opportunity to go to college or a trade school, become independent and be a part of our communities. But if budget cuts are allowed to continue many youth like me will wind up homeless, without an education, in jail or just out on the street alone.”

Participating legislators included: Speaker John Perez, Senators Gil Cedillo, Denise Ducheny, Mark DeSaulnier, Loni Hancock, Mark Leno and Carol Liu, and Assembly Members Anthony Adams, Jim Beall, Anna Marie Caballero, Wesley Chesbro, Paul Cook, Hector De La Torre, Bill Emmerson, Danny Gilmore, Alyson Huber, Bonnie Lowenthal, Fiona Ma, Tony Mendoza, Brian Nestande, Roger Niello, Jim Nielsen, Anthony Portantino, Sandre Swanson and Mariko Yamada.

Many of the youth also attended the Assembly Budget Subcommittee hearing this afternoon, and join the hundreds – including social workers, foster families, and advocates with community-based organizations – who shared what the Governor’s devastating cut has meant for vulnerable children.

“Foster children remind us how important the budget decisions we make are, because these children are legally and literally the responsibility of our state,” said Assembly Member Danny Gilmore. “I’m grateful that so many youth have generously shared their stories with us, and I encourage my colleagues to carefully consider the impact our decisions have on the children whose lives we are entrusted to protect.”

The day – Take a Foster Youth to the Capitol – was organized by *Protect Our Children. Protect Our Future.*, a broad-based coalition committed to protecting California’s abused and neglected children. For more information about the coalition, visit www.protectourchildrenca.org.