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CONTACT: Marv Mich, coordinator, 585-262-7021 (Catholic Family Center) or Father Brian Cool, 275-8523 (Chair, Bishop's Public Policy Committee).

PUBLIC POLICY WEEKEND TO FOCUS ON CHILDREN AT RISK

Roman Catholics will be signing a petition to New York Governor Spitzer and other state government officials as part of their study of the subject of "Children at Risk" at parishes throughout the 12-county Diocese of Rochester this weekend (Feb. 10-11, 2007). They'll be examining what they can do as a faith group and as New York citizens to battle high rates of child poverty and gaps in early-childhood education - as well as to encourage state lawmakers to put more resources into issues affecting families and children.

The issue of **children at risk** was chosen as a topic of study and action because evidence strongly suggests that New York State simply is not doing enough for provide quality childcare and early education for all children in New York. We've fallen considerably behind a number of other states. Sadly, nearly 900,000 children in New York State, roughly 19 percent, live in poverty. In the 12 counties of our Diocese, 73,000 children are growing up in families with incomes below or at the federal poverty level.

Bishop Clark addresses the issue in his February *Catholic Courier* column to be published tomorrow: "The picture is no better nationwide: "With nearly 36 million residents, 'Poverty USA' is the largest state in America, according to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. Today, 12.9 million children -- 1 in 6 -- live in poverty. Yet a recent Gallup poll found that only 5 percent of Americans believe poverty and homelessness are important problems for the country."

The goals of Public Policy Weekend/Children at Risk are:

- To make Catholics more aware of the startling statistics – and the real children behind those statistics who suffer poverty and other forms of deprivation in our state.
- To ask people not only to pray, but also to take concrete action by signing a petition that reads: "The first years of a child's life are crucial to healthy development. Therefore, we urge the New York State Assembly, Senate and Governor Spitzer to budget for expanded investment in quality child care, quality early education programs and services in the earliest years of our children's lives, including early intervention and home visiting."
- To continue to educate ourselves about what might be done on an individual and parish level to help children at risk.
- With this new knowledge, to monitor and speak out in the future on how our tax dollars might better be spent to help these children.
- To encourage all Catholics to get involved on a more personal basis in diocesan, parish and community programs that assist children at risk. Catholics will be encouraged to volunteer in tutoring and mentoring programs, and for programs that help families through crises, abuse situations and other domestic and economic issues. "Through personal contact and involvement, we can begin to better understand the issues at a deeper level and can make a personal difference," Bishop Clark writes.

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Public Policy weekend news release

For additional resources, visit <http://www.dor.org> and click on the "Children at Risk" link.