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ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

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Gov. Blagojevich announces \$9.6 million to provide supportive housing and services for children and young adults in Chicago

*Pilot program will serve as model for how to combine
State resources to benefit former wards of DCFS
and children being raised by relatives*

CHICAGO – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today announced \$9.6 million for a new pilot program that will help provide supportive housing and services for approximately 170 young adults leaving the state’s foster care system, and for children being raised by relatives or other caregivers. Under the program, these two groups will live in the same Chicago housing complexes, share on-site supportive services and become each other’s support network. If successful, the program could be expanded to other parts of the state.

“Young adults leaving foster care and children who are being raised by family members need better access to good health care, education and a safe environment. This program will help provide a safe and stable environment where they can learn how to become independent and responsible, continue their education and have a shot at a better future,” said Gov. Blagojevich.

The pilot’s developers - Interfaith Housing Development Corporation of Chicago and their service provider partners, Sankofa Safe Child Initiative and Coppin AME Church - will select approximately 75 young adults aged 18-21 years who are transitioning out of foster care and 44 kinship families where the children are being raised by relatives to benefit from the program. All potential residents must be referred by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and other social service providers, and be at risk of becoming homeless. Sankofa House and Coppin House will be built in Chicago’s North Lawndale and Washington Park neighborhoods and are expected to be completed by Spring 2008.

Both developments will offer on-site services that include case management, life skills training, mentoring, job coaching and personal budgeting to benefit the young adults, the children in kinship families and their caregivers. Providing quality housing with social service support will create an environment that makes it easier for young adults to finish high school, move to technical or higher education and address socialization issues.

The Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) allocated \$9.6 million in state and federal funds to launch the pilot program. IHDA funds were used to leverage the City of Chicago's tax-exempt bonds as well as the equity generated from the allocation of automatic tax credits. IHDA will also utilize the state's own bond capital allocations to facilitate financing for more of these innovating projects across Illinois.

Sankofa House located in North Lawndale will offer 58 units of affordable housing. Thirty-nine apartments will be reserved for the former foster care youth alongside 19 large kinship units. The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) also committed \$151,360 to assure energy efficiency in the home design.

Coppin House in Washington Park will be a 54-unit development. Twenty-eight of the units will be for young adults aging out of the foster care system with the remaining 26 units targeted to kinship families. The development also received a \$164,105 energy grant from DCEO.

Both developments will consist of one, two, three and four-bedroom apartments. Monthly rents vary from \$700 to \$1,000, depending on unit size. DCFS will subsidize one hundred per cent of the rent for transitioning youth who are not yet employed. Working young adults will be asked to pay a maximum of 30 per cent of their income towards rent, with the remaining balance subsidized by DCFS. Similarly, working kinship families will be required to contribute a maximum of 30 per cent of their household income towards rent, while federal Section 8 vouchers will cover the outstanding amount.

IHDA also recently approved financing for Hamilton Place, a town home-style new construction development in West Englewood specifically for grandparents over 60 years of age raising five or more grandchildren and at risk of homelessness. The project is expected to be completed in Spring 2008 and is being developed by Neighborhood Housing Services Redevelopment Corporation, a nonprofit organization that combats community deterioration throughout Chicago. Childserv, a Chicago area service provider, will provide case management and other support services for both the guardians and the children.

"Illinois is already taking a lead in providing continued support for foster children well beyond their departure from the foster care system. Bringing together aging out foster youth and kinship families and creating an innovative type of supportive housing around them is both smart and efficient. The caregivers in the kinship families can be role models and provide emotional support while also receiving the benefits of the supportive services themselves, reducing stress on these vulnerable families," said Kelly King Dibble, executive director of the Illinois Housing Development Authority.

Sankofa House and Coppin House are among the first of a wave of innovative housing efforts expected to grow from the 2005 *Building for Success: Illinois Comprehensive Housing Plan*. In the plan, the Governor calls for state agencies to work with the private sector to leverage all available resources in the creation of affordable housing that targets the needs of specific high-risk populations.

“This pilot project reinforces Governor Blagojevich’s commitment to help the more than 100,000 grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren in the state of Illinois. These are compassionate individuals who make many sacrifices and step outside of the traditional role to selflessly raise their grandchildren,” IDoA Director Charles D. Johnson said.

“This program targets two of our most vulnerable populations,” said DCFS Acting Director Erwin McEwen. “The on-site sharing of supportive services establishes a natural vehicle for promoting stabilization and networking for our children and our youth who are transitioning into adulthood.”

Since 2003, Governor Blagojevich has taken several measures to help kinship families and former wards of the state. He nearly doubled funding for The Department on Aging’s Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program this year, approving an additional \$200,000 over the fiscal year 2006 allocation. The program provides assistance with paying for emergency needs, utility bills, medications, food and clothing. Illinois has also become a national leader in taking advantage of federal and state funds to provide continued care for young adults aging out of foster care up until the age of 21. Sharing the DCFS-funded services for young adults aging out of foster care both populations stand to benefit from the same amount of investment.

The new approach to affordable housing highlighted in the plan is based on the understanding that affordable housing with the right targeted support is critical to reducing the number of Illinois residents residing in costly institutions – ranging from nursing homes to foster care to prisons. Quality affordable housing also reduces unemployment and promotes access to education.

“A key component of this project is the intergenerational mix of populations. Young people aging out of foster care need the safety net that permanent supportive housing provides, while enabling them to acquire the skills and confidence necessary to thrive independently. Low-income family members taking on the challenge of raising the children of other family members can provide emotional support to other residents while they receive the benefits of the supportive services as well,” said Gladys Jordan, president of Interfaith Housing Development Corp.

Governor Blagojevich is the first governor in Illinois history to require a coordinated plan for the investment of resources earmarked for affordable housing at several state agencies that have affordable housing programs.

A 35-member Housing Task Force consisting of advocates, developers, lenders and state agency representatives developed the 2005 Housing Plan - the first statewide housing plan to increase affordable housing options to help six priority populations: very low income households and families; low income seniors; low income people with disabilities; homeless people and those at risk of homelessness; low and moderate income families and people unable to find affordable

housing near jobs or transportation; and low income families and people living in existing affordable housing in danger of becoming unaffordable. Sankofa House, Coppin House and Hamilton Place address the affordable housing needs of low-income individuals and families in danger of becoming homeless.

The Task Force recently released “*On the Road to Success: Illinois Comprehensive Housing Plan 2006*” which continues to build on the coordinated success of the 2005 Comprehensive Housing Plan, and the 2007 plan is currently in preparation.