

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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**GOVERNOR SPITZER ANNOUNCES FIRST APPLICATION RECEIVED FOR
LANDMARK COMMUNITY HEALTH PROGRAM FOR FOSTER CHILDREN**
Bridges to Health Helps Keep Disabled Foster Children in Community

Governor Eliot Spitzer and Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Commissioner Gladys Carrión today announced that the agency has received the first application for its new Bridges to Health comprehensive community care program, which focuses on the most vulnerable children in foster care. The program is the first of its kind in the nation and will commence on January 1, 2008.

Bridges to Health will provide expanded and enhanced services to at least 3,300 foster children with disabilities, including children in OCFS custody, over the next three years. These children typically have serious emotional problems or developmental disabilities or are medically fragile. The program also will serve their families, including birth parents, foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and siblings.

“The Bridges to Health program is vital for the health and well being of thousands of foster children in New York State,” said Governor Spitzer. “Ensuring that our children receive the care, guidance and support they need has been, and continues to be, one of this administration’s top priorities. Today marks the first step forward to get this program off the ground and I encourage other families who can benefit from its services to apply as well.”

Bridges to Health will include just over a dozen services, including health care coordination; family and caregiver support; crisis management; intensive home care support; immediate crisis response services; accessibility modifications; and advocacy for the children’s participation in school and other community activities. Once children are enrolled in the program, they may be eligible for services until they are 21 years old.

Senator Carl Kruger, Chair of the Senate's Social Services, Children and Families said: "Bridges to Health accomplishes the important goal of lowering the State's health care costs in addressing the complex needs of most disabled children in foster care. Equally as important, in initiating this program we have demonstrated groundbreaking success in seeking ways to keeping these children in home settings and out of institutions. This is a model that the rest of the nation would do well to emulate. A special thank you to both Governor Spitzer and Commissioner Carrion for spearheading this groundbreaking initiative."

Commissioner Carrión said: “This innovative new program will help us better care for our children in foster care, keep them closer to their homes and families, and keep them out of more costly institutional care. Our responsibility does not end once these children are out of the system. Services will continue through successful reunification with their

families or adoption, through young adulthood, so that children can reach their full potential.”

State Health Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D., said: “This is another example of Governor Spitzer's commitment to children and of state agencies' collaborative efforts to ensure that children, particularly the most vulnerable children, have access to the health services they need.”

Medical institutionalization of disabled children annually costs \$185,000 to \$300,000 per child. Bridges to Health, even with these expanded and enhanced services, will have a significantly lower annual cost of approximately \$50,000 per child. The program is approved by the federal Department of Health and Human Services to use Medicaid funding to provide services not otherwise available through Medicaid.

By the third year of implementation, when all the slots are filled, New York State's investment in Bridges to Health will be \$73 million annually.

Bridges to Health is part of Governor Spitzer's Children's Agenda, aimed at improving opportunities for all New York children, including those with special needs. It will include the enrollment of children in New York City and the Rochester and Albany regions in the first year. The program will then expand to the Syracuse and the Lower Hudson Valley regions in the second year, and to Long Island and the Buffalo region by the third year – providing services to the entire state.

The first seven not-for-profit child care agencies that OCFS has contracted with are:

New York City

Abbott House

Cardinal McCloskey Services

Jewish Child Care Association

SCO Family of Services

Albany region

Northeast Parent and Child Society

Parsons Child and Family Center

Rochester region

Hillside Children's Center

Bridges to Health will evaluate the children and the caregivers in the program every six months to measure their progress.

The program was shaped and created through the joint efforts of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services and the state Department of Health with input from the Office of Mental Health and the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

Additional information on how and where to apply is available on OCFS' website at www.ocfs.state.ny.us/bridgestohealth.