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Contact:

Laura Castelli
518-689-7223 (work)
518-225-8993 (cell)
lcastelli@corningplace.com

Literacy Advocates Converge on City Hall

Speak Out Against Proposed Cuts to the State's Adult Literacy Budget.

New York, N.Y. – Speaking to a crowd filled with students, teachers, tutors and local electeds, adult literacy advocates from across New York City called on the state Legislature to restore funding to the city's Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program and GED testing sites.

ALE, a statewide program with more than 50 programs throughout the state, would lose \$2 million in state funding under the proposed 2010-11 state budget. This cut is in addition to a \$612,000 cut in the 2009-10 Deficit Reduction Plan (DRP). Each literacy program in the state stands to lose nearly 40 percent of all funding.

"The Adult Literacy Education program cannot sustain this type of cut," said Kevin Smith, executive director of the Literacy New York. "With 22 percent of New York adults below basic literacy level, and 33 percent of New York City adults below basic literacy level, our program helps thousands of New Yorkers every year. This program provides the educational services and support students need to achieve, as well as the knowledge and opportunity to succeed in today's workforce."

The State Education Department (SED) also has announced a \$1.15-million cut to GED testing sites in New York, suspending testing site contracts by July 1, 2010. These sites would no longer receive the \$20 per-test reimbursement. If these cuts are implemented, GED test sites would be responsible for all administrative costs for the exam. This cut is proposed even as the current \$20 per-test reimbursement from NYSED only partially offsets hundreds of dollars in actual costs.

"These programs provide important educational services our communities need," said Anthony Ng, Deputy Director of Policy & Advocacy, United Neighborhood Houses, and member of the New York Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCAL) steering committee. "It is unacceptable that the funding has been slashed. These programs are truly an economic stimulus for the city, the state and the individuals. The adult students share the education, knowledge and opportunity with their family, friends and children."

New York City Councilwoman Sara Gonzalez attended the news conference. "I have worked with these groups for years, and I have seen first hand the positive impact this program has, not only on the individual, but on the family, the neighborhood and the community," she said. "The benefits of educating New York's adults – giving them the opportunity to read, to write, and to further their education – is the foundation for our state and our city's prosperity. I urge our state legislators to reject the proposed cuts to adult literacy."

Anna Lucia Toral, a student at Queens Community House, said, "This program is so important because we need communication to work and to help our children with their school. We live

here and we need to communicate; we go to the doctor, go shopping and we still need to communicate, even when people don't speak Spanish.

Susana Torres, a student-turned-tutor, now works at Queens Community House. "I didn't even know the word 'next,'" she said of her early experiences as a student. "This program has enabled me to succeed on so many levels. Not only do I speak English, but I'm now helping and tutoring other students. This is an amazing program."

Bruce Carmel, Deputy Executive Director of Turning Point, and member of the NYCAL steering committee, said, "These cuts to adult literacy will weaken a student's ability to excel in their education or their career. There are thousands of New Yorkers every year who fight for the chance to learn how to read and to write, and for the chance to earn a GED and reach beyond their former limitations. The proposed cuts will result in fewer New Yorkers receiving basic literacy education."

Smith said he understands these are tough economic times for New York. "But we are not asking for what our programs are worth, only enough so our doors don't have to close," he said.

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Since 1977, Literacy New York (LNY) has been a leading advocate for adult literacy in New York State and nationally. Literacy New York provides technical, program, and training assistance and workshops to a network of 37 local, community-based affiliates who annually provide over 400,000 hours of reading and basic skills instruction to adult learners.

The New York Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCAL) is comprised of teachers, managers, students, and allies from community-based organizations, advocacy groups, public libraries, colleges in the City University of New York, and Department of Education adult literacy programs across New York City. NYCAL seeks to create an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services to current students and other adults who require it. NYCAL believes that being able to read and write, learn English, obtain a GED, and enter training and post secondary education are the rights of every New Yorker and the cornerstone to an equitable and just society.