

For Release on: 12/15/11

Contacts:

Maine Children's Alliance: Judy Reidt-Parker, 215-9556

Maine Head Start Directors Association: Kathy Colfer, 859-1618

Third Annual Report of Head Start in Maine

AUGUSTA –The Maine Children's Alliance released its third annual data report on Maine's Head Start programs today. The report uses program and statewide data to highlight the past year's successes and challenges and identify trends over the past three years.

Head Start promotes school readiness for children in low-income families by offering educational, nutritional, health, social and other services. Programs actively engage parents in their children's learning and help them in making progress toward their educational, literacy and employment goals.

Head Start programs play a significant role in ensuring that Maine's low income working families have stable, nurturing, consistent child care arrangements for their children. Access to stable reliable child care has been proven to be one of the most effective strategies for families on public assistance to achieve self-sufficiency.

This important program is currently threatened in the Governor's proposed budget. "The proposal to eliminate state funding for Head Start in the Governor's budget heads our state in the wrong direction," said Judy Reidt-Parker, Early Childhood Policy Analyst at the Maine Children's Alliance. "These cuts would result in Maine families having even less opportunity to build financial independence through employment or education. The old adage 'pennywise but a pound foolish' definitely applies when cutting early childhood programs."

John Shoos of the United Way of Greater Portland highlighted the importance of the program to the community, saying "Head Start in Maine supports the current workforce by providing full day/ full year services for low income working parents, and supports the healthy growth and development of Maine's future workforce."

Scientific evidence and economic analysis have demonstrated that providing a child with a safe, healthy and nurturing early childhood experience results in significant positive outcomes later in that child's life. When families are healthy, children do better

in school, workers are more productive, and businesses can add jobs because their health costs are lower.

Head Start programs receive most of their funding directly from federal grants. Since 1983, Head Start programs have provided additional state funded services. In 1999, Head Start was included in the Fund for a Healthy Maine (FHM) allocation. Both of these state funding resources would be eliminated under the Governor's proposed budget.

According to Kathy Colfer, Chair of the Maine Head Start Directors, "Both these streams of state funding are essential in order to maintain the current number of Head Start slots in Maine. A reduction in state funding would result in a significant loss of service to Maine families."

Currently Maine has the capacity to serve only 29% of Head Start eligible children.

To access the report online, please visit the Maine Children's Alliance website: www.mekids.org. For a print copy, call 623-1868, ext. 202.