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***Planned Select Committee Will Attempt to Turn the Corner
on California's Foster Care Challenges***

LOS ANGELES/SACRAMENTO — At a ceremony and press conference to be held on May 27, 2005 at the Edelman Children's Courthouse in Monterey Park, Assemblymember Karen Bass will announce her intention to form a first-ever Select Committee to address challenges and issues impacting our state's most vulnerable and at-risk children.

Each year, close to three quarters of a million of California's children come into contact with our child welfare system. More than half are age five or under. Los Angeles, alone, is home to the country's largest child welfare system, accounting for an astounding one in ten foster children nationwide.

Life for too many youth in foster care is characterized by movement from placement to placement, disruption of schooling, and the severing of ties with all that is familiar to the child (often including siblings and family). It is thus not surprising that foster youth find it difficult to keep up -- 75% of children in foster care are working below grade level in school, almost half do not complete high school, and as few as 15% attend college. Nor is it surprising that these troubled youth become troubled adults; within two to four years after young people emancipate from foster care, 51% are unemployed, 30% are on public assistance, 25% become homeless, and one in five are incarcerated. See www.clcla.org

The proposed Select Committee would hold hearings through the state and seek to forge new approaches in regard to these and other challenges confronting our state's most vulnerable youth. Assemblymember Bass explained, "The time is ripe for change. Failure to turn the corner will result not simply in an ongoing human toll, but also in dramatic adverse fiscal penalties for our state, given California's failure to meet nearly every category assessed in the state's recent federal child welfare system review."

Plans for the Select Committee were welcomed by Miriam Aroni Krinsky, Executive Director of Children's Law Center of Los Angeles -- counsel for over 20,000 foster youth and organizers of the yearly May Foster Care Awareness Campaign for the past three years: "We must act now, before more of our state's youth find themselves adrift in our struggling foster care system," she observed. "With improved leadership and enhanced collaboration among the many systems that impact the lives of youth in foster care, positive advances can begin to take form."

The proposal for this landmark legislative focus on foster youth marks the culmination of the May 2005 Foster Care Awareness Campaign. The Awareness Campaign, co-sponsored by a roundtable of advocacy, governmental, judicial, and public interest organizations, brings public attention to the need for increased community support for youth in the Los Angeles foster care system.

At the May 27th event, the Campaign will also honor Chief Justice of California Ronald M. George for his work on behalf of foster children, thereby underscoring the critical role the courts play in improving the lives of foster youth. As the Select Committee undertakes its work, it is expected that it will closely examine ways to support and enhance the court's role, along with other comprehensive recommendations issued last May by the national, nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care.

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