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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Child Advocacy Program (CAP) to sponsor a Conference on Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare**

**December 6, 2010 – Cambridge, Mass.** - In an effort to address what is now widely viewed as the key issue in child welfare, Harvard Law School's Child Advocacy Program will sponsor a major conference in January on racial disproportionality.

The conference, which will be held January 28-29, 2011 at Harvard Law School, comes amidst a ground-shifting debate that has emerged among leading child welfare experts.

For the past decade plus, a number of powerful groups (led by what is known as the Casey-CSSP Alliance) have taken the position that black children are over-represented in foster care because of systematic discrimination by the child welfare system. These groups have called for solutions focused on reducing the number of black children removed to foster care, and they have persuaded many states and many key federal officials to adopt this approach.

But others now question the claim that removal rates reflect social worker discrimination, pointing to the fact that black families are disproportionately victimized by poverty and related conditions that predict for maltreatment, together with other evidence that black children in fact suffer maltreatment at higher rates than white children. They call for targeted prevention and substance abuse programs and also for broader anti-poverty programs, with the goal of reducing actual maltreatment. Proponents of this view note that new research reports call into question the Casey Alliance position.

One such report is the spring 2010 "National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect" (NIS-4). Designed to measure actual as vs. official rates of maltreatment, it finds that black children suffer actual maltreatment at nearly twice the rate of white children. This reverses prior NIS claims that black and white maltreatment rates were the same, which had been heavily relied on by the Casey Alliance, and thus dramatically undermines the Casey-CSSP Alliance position that removal rates reflect official discrimination.

But all agree that the current racial picture demands correction. Black children represent only 15% of the general population and yet they account for more than one third of the foster care population. "Children victimized by maltreatment may need the protection of foster care, but they will not do well in later life compared to children growing up in nurturing families from birth onwards," said Harvard Law School Professor Elizabeth Bartholet, faculty director of

the Child Advocacy Program. “Those victimized by maltreatment will be disproportionately at risk for unemployment, substance abuse, incarceration and domestic violence, and they will be disproportionately likely to maltreat their own children, thus continuing the cycle into the next generation.”

The Conference is designed to bring together all essential stakeholders in the debate, including those on different sides of the argument, as well as key policy makers including state and local legislators, child welfare administrators, and judges. Leading social scientists will present the best and most recent research on the issues, with the goal of helping policy makers apply empirical analysis to guide policy.

The highly respected Chapin Hall Center at the University of Chicago is Affiliate Sponsor for the Conference. Participating organizations include the National CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

**The Conference is Invitation-Only, to encourage serious dialogue, but key members of the media are being invited to attend because of the importance of educating the broader public about the issues. Conference proceedings will be off the record, for background only.**

**For additional information, please contact:**

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**For the conference webpage with details, including the conference schedule and agenda:**

<http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/about/cap/cap-conferences/rd-conference/rd-conference-index.html>

**To register:**

If you want to attend, **you must register** (there is no fee) by clicking on the below link: <http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/about/cap/cap-conferences/rd-conference/rd.conference.registration.invitees.html>