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Contact: Marci Bransdorf (410) 223-2852
mbransdorf@aecf.org

Remarks Made by Annie E. Casey Foundation President Douglas W. Nelson at the 2005 Baltimore Leadership in Action Program Launch

Good afternoon and welcome to this important moment in this city's and this state's movement to change the future for all our children.

Two years ago, this very week, I joined Mayor O'Malley, investor Eddie Brown, and a host of other civic leaders to launch the Reason to Believe Campaign. Reason to Believe was our way of deepening this city's commitment to assure that even our most vulnerable children and families had the opportunities and the support they need to catch up, to succeed and to thrive.

Reason to Believe was built on the realization that to write the next chapter in our city's and our state's progress, we had to come together in new ways and act in new ways. We set out to put more resources into proven programs and to extend those programs to those kids and families at greatest risk of being left behind. It was and remains our conviction that we – all of us – city, state, foundations, non-profits – have a moral obligation to prevent preventable disadvantage, to build a level playing field for all our children, and to quit spending precious resources on high cost remediation, because of our foolhardy unwillingness to invest in effective earlier interventions.

Over the last two years Reason to Believe has raised over \$28 million in support of these core goals and principles. Of that effort, nothing surpasses in importance the work that has been done – by people in this room – to insist that more of our kids are ready to learn and succeed in school.

The Baltimore Leadership in Action Program reflects that best of everything we mean about new ways of working together and working smarter. The organizations represented in this room have now put a lot of collective work and learning into an impressive plan that will make a real difference for Maryland's young children. I applaud you all.

I'm especially grateful to Donna Stark whose vision and support for B-LAP has been the Casey Foundation's most important contribution to this crucial initiative.

I also want to assure you all that the Annie E. Casey Foundation will continue to support the implementation of today's ambitious and timely plan – with both our advocacy and our dollars.

I think it's important, however, to remember that Casey's money and the dollars of our philanthropic and business partners are but a small fraction of the public funds that are

being and need to be spent to assure that Maryland's kids have the preschool care, supports, and experiences they need to succeed. So I call on our legislative and public partners to join us in finding the resources our kids deserve, in coordinating our programmatic effort more fully, in measuring our progress more transparently, and being held more accountable for the success we must achieve.

In the end, no issue of social fairness is more basic than giving every child a fair start . . . a fair chance to learn. This is something in which we simply must believe – and which all of your work to date – has given us Reason to Believe.

I think no one is more appreciative of that contribution to our future than Baltimore's premier champion and chief believer – my friend, colleague and Mayor – Martin O'Malley.

Baltimore's Five-Year Action Plan for Achieving School Readiness, a comprehensive plan that, when implemented, will put Baltimore City on the road to making real and measurable gains in the school readiness of its youngest children, from birth to age five, is available at http://www.aecf.org/publications/data/blap_5yr_action_plan.pdf.