



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION INTENSIFIES SUPPORT FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN MISSISSIPPI DELTA

\$420,000 Going to Groups Fighting for Education Reform

SEATTLE, WA – In an effort to infuse the fight for quality education with necessary funding, the Marguerite Casey Foundation announced \$420,000 to four Mississippi Delta community-based organizations.

“This is the first allotment of targeted funding to a region of Mississippi hard pressed to provide quality education to its students of color,” says Luz Vega-Marquis, President and CEO of the Marguerite Casey Foundation. “The public school system is in a desperate state across the Delta, demanding new strategies in funding low-income families to create grassroots change.”

Four organizations will receive the funding to continue their work on increasing civic engagement on education reform among low-income families, all of which belong to the Mississippi Education Working Group (MEWG) and span three counties in the Delta. MEWG is a coalition of grassroots community organizations working to create quality, first-rate public educational opportunity for African American families in their school districts.

“These organizations, no matter their size, have proven to be cornerstones in their communities,” says Vega-Marquis, “they have worked toward and expressed interest in expanding coalition building efforts and family-led social change.”

The State Board of Education acknowledges that there is a statewide crisis of insufficient numbers of teachers in the schools, especially in the area of basic skills, such as reading and math, and that Mississippi schools rank among the lowest in the United States in teacher salaries, per pupil expenditures, and student performance on standardized testing. In addition, every year the racial balance among teachers and administrators shifts in the direction of domination by Caucasians (teachers are now 75% Caucasian, 25% African American), even as the racial balance of students in the public schools becomes increasingly African American. Mississippi is 37% African American, but its public schools are 56% African American.



Marguerite Casey Foundation began funding in Mississippi and other southern states in 2002, providing over \$2.2M to the state. “We at the Foundation have found the perseverance of Mississippi families inspiring. Our own course of action follows our promise to ask questions, listen to communities about their needs, and act according to those wishes. It is clear that these organizations required additional support to continue their social change efforts.”

About Marguerite Casey Foundation

Based in Seattle, Washington, the Marguerite Casey Foundation is a private, independent grant making foundation whose mission is to help low-income families strengthen their voice and organize their communities in order to achieve a more just and equitable society. Through general support grants, the Foundation supports community-based leadership and promotes education, activism and advocacy among families, parents, and youth.

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Marguerite Casey Foundation is an independent, private, grant-making foundation helping low-income families strengthen their voice and mobilize their communities in order to achieve a more just and equitable society for all.

MCF's goal is to strengthen families and communities across the United States by supporting community-based leadership development, promoting education, activism and advocacy among families, parents, caregivers and youth. The Foundation seeks to nurture a movement of low-income families and communities by building constituencies, strengthening organizations and connecting grantees across regions and across issues facing low-income families.

Created by Casey Family Programs in an effort to extend its long history as a leader in child welfare, MCF began operations in 2001. With an initial endowment of \$600 million and a distinguished Board of Directors, MCF knew the organization could have a significant, lasting impact on the lives of children, youth and families nationwide.

MCF is dedicated to creating a movement of working families advocating on their own behalf. The Foundation is guided by the firm belief that significant positive change is not only possible, but absolutely necessary. Within this framework, the Foundation seeks to do the following:

- Support and nurture strong, vibrant activism within and among families, enabling them to advocate for their own interests and improve the public and private systems that impact their lives.
- Examine, change and inform the advancement of social and economic policies and practices that promote the development of strong families and strong communities.
- Encourage the development of a coherent knowledge base for advocates, families and the organizations that serve them.
- Invest in system change and cross-system change in order to generate greater knowledge and provide effective working models for practice.

The Foundation's target population includes low-income families, communities of color and youth residing in rural and urban areas in the West, Southwest, Deep South, Chicago and Washington State. This year marks the launch of a new sub-regional strategy that commits the Foundation to significant long-term funding in Mississippi's Delta region and Texas' Rio Grande Valley.

The dedicated team of MCF Board of Directors includes Ruth W. Massinga (Chair), Freeman A. Hrabowski III (Treasurer), William H. Foegen (Secretary), Douglas X. Patiño, Joan B. Poliak, Patricia Schroeder, and Gary R. Severson.

Building a Movement of Low-Income Families

Key drivers of change will facilitate...

Greater organized self-advocacy and activism by working poor families with the skills, knowledge, access and support networks to be effective in reforming public policy

Cornerstone Organizations

- Well-established in target communities
- Effective in training parents/youth as leaders, advocates and/or organizers
- Successful in helping families achieve policy change

Highly Engaged Base of Constituents

- Skilled leaders - parents & youth - from low income neighbourhoods communities of color
- Self-interest and education in community issues

Network of Networks

- Sustained connections between constituencies and organizations across regions and issue areas
- Collective capacity for regional and national movement-building

Cross-Systems Change Efforts

- Successful policy reforms driven by working poor families using:
- Facts based on action research
- Strategic framing of issues
- Institutional relationships

...Movement-building

- A substantial, growing, engaged constituent base comprised of working poor families and natural allies who share their interests
- Supported by strong, sustainable community-based organizations which are linked with each other regionally and cross-regionally and across disciplinary, ethnic, and ideological boundaries
- Benefiting from a sophisticated communications effort that utilizes strategic framing to shape media images of their issues and to ensure consistency of message across all participants
- Informed by excellent data and analysis as well as candid feedback from evaluation efforts
- Understand the needs and desires of different races and cultures while bringing a multicultural perspective to reform efforts
- Capable of responding quickly and decisively to opportunities as they arise via the collective capacity of a nimble, "21st Century" coordination structure that effectively uses technology
- Constantly renewing itself by identifying, training, and promoting new leaders within its ranks



Luz A. Vega-Marquis, President and Chief Executive Officer

Luz A. Vega-Marquis has led Marguerite Casey Foundation since December 2001. As president, she manages the Foundation's investment portfolio, leads its effort to disburse approximately \$30 million in grants annually and spearheads the organization's focus to positively impact families, youth and children.

Prior to joining the Foundation, Ms. Vega-Marquis served as executive director of the Community Technology Foundation of California, a community foundation based in San Francisco. She was instrumental in developing the strategic framework of CTFC's grants program as well as energizing the CTFC vision of bringing information technology to under-served communities throughout California. Ms. Vega-Marquis' nonprofit experience includes four years as vice president and chief operating officer at the National Economic Development and Law Center, an organization committed to providing technical, law and business expertise to distressed communities nationwide. Her career also encompasses 17 years at the James Irvine Foundation, where she served as director of grants programs, senior program officer in charge of northern California office and program officer.

A leader in her field, Ms. Vega-Marquis has contributed widely to the philanthropic community. A founder of Hispanics in Philanthropy, she has served on numerous boards including the Council of Foundations, Northern California Grantmakers, The Women's Foundation and Katalysis Foundation. She currently serves on The California Wellness Foundation board of directors. A graduate of the University of San Francisco, Ms. Vega-Marquis received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Modern Languages and earned a Masters degree in Latin American Studies from Stanford University.



Marguerite Casey Foundation's Board of Directors

Ruth W. Massinga:

Ms. Massinga is President and Chief Executive Officer of Casey Family Programs and Chair of the Board for Marguerite Casey Foundation. Both are Seattle based, private foundations that are committed to supporting families, youth and children in reaching their full potential. She holds a Master's degree in Social Services from Boston University

Freeman A. Hrabowski, III:

Freeman A. Hrabowski, III, has served as President of The University of Maryland, Baltimore County since May 1992. He joined the University in 1987, serving first as Vice Provost, then as Executive Vice President. Dr. Hrabowski graduated at age 19 from Hampton Institute with highest honors in mathematics, and he received his M.A. (mathematics) and Ph.D. (higher education administration/statistics) from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign at age 24.

William Foege:

William H. Foege is an epidemiologist who worked in the successful campaign to eradicate smallpox in the 1970s. In January 1997, he joined the faculty of Emory University, where he is Presidential Distinguished Professor of International Health at the Rollins School of Public Health. In September 1999, Dr. Foege became a Senior Medical Advisor for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. He attended Pacific Lutheran University, received his medical degree from the University of Washington, and his Master's degree in Public Health from Harvard University.

Douglas X. Patiño:

Dr. Douglas X. Patiño, with three decades of service as an executive in education, state governments and philanthropy, is Vice Chancellor Emeritus for the California State University system. He also serves as Professor of Social Work at CSU, Los Angeles, and as President of The Patiño Group. Dr. Patiño earned a Ph.D. in human behavior (urban development) from United States International University in San Diego.

Joan Poliak:

Joan Poliak, Master's in Social Work, Academy of Clinical Social Workers, has worked as a practicing Social Worker in public and private agencies advocating for children and families for over 40 years, providing therapy, initiating parent education programs, training foster parents, and creating a multitude of pragmatic, real-time support and tools to children and families in need.

Gary Severson:

Gary Severson is the former chairman of the board of First Interstate Bank of Washington. Prior to his tenure at First Interstate, he held positions with Security Pacific Bank and Bank of America in London and Los Angeles. Mr. Severson, who holds a Master's in Business Administration and a Bachelor's in Arts from Stanford and an Master's in Science from the University of Southern California, is actively engaged in the Seattle business community and has served on numerous boards and advisory committees that reflect his diverse interests.



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Action Communication and Education Reform

ACER

Also known as Concerned Citizens of Montgomery County, ACER was formed in 1997 to bring parents, students and community members together to create quality educational opportunities for low-income African American families.

ACER achieves its goals through community organizing, policy advocacy, and community education. It currently has three programmatic focus areas: United Concerned Citizens is a coalition of parents and students working together to increase community civic participation; Youth Innovation Movement (YIM) is a youth-led leadership development focused on public school reform and criminal juvenile justice reform; Project CAM (cultural arts and multi-media justice) is an intergenerational technology, communication and culture awareness program that captures the community's oral and organizing history while introducing technology to this rural community.

Montgomery County has 12,400 residents, 45 percent of whom are African American. Twenty seven percent of the residents are below poverty level and 55 percent have high school diplomas. Only six percent have completed four years of college.

Marguerite Casey Foundation general support funding will help ACER to expand its education and organizing efforts to improve civic engagement and reform public schools in Montgomery County, Mississippi.



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Citizens for Quality Education

CQE

Founded in 1996, CQE is a community-based leadership development, education and training organization based on the principle that all children have a right to a free public education. They will concentrate their work organizing parents and children to reform the juvenile justice system and to change the way the Youth Court interfaces with public schools.

CQE members are out in the community exploring strategies to bring attention to the increasing incarceration of youth of color, including documenting and intervening in instances where youth are referred to Youth Court. CQE also provides specialized training and expertise for parents on specific issues such as special Education, No Child Left Behind, duties and responsibilities of elected officials, and the Mississippi Statewide Student Assessment System. The group has an after school reading program and a Youth Governance Initiative, which supports youth to effectively participate in decision making at the civic level.

Marguerite Casey Foundation general support funding will facilitate CQE's ongoing efforts to ground young people in social justice and community change work, as well as engage community members in building a shared vision of a just society. The funds will go directly to education, advocacy and organizing initiatives to involve parents and students in Holmes County in the reform the juvenile justice system in the state of Mississippi.



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Community Culture and Resource Center

CCRC

Formed in 1992, CCRC organizes, educates and assists local communities in developing strategies for community education and leadership development. CCRC will focus their efforts on addressing low achievement and under representation of African Americans at the policy and decision-making levels in the local school district.

CCRC helps youth, parents and others in the Holmes County community to develop leadership within the public school system and to advocate for change. CCRC's program components include youth leadership development, conflict resolution; and its teen corps program for school age children. Teen corps currently focuses on keeping youth ages 12 to 17 out of the Youth Court system by intervening with high risk youth, and involving them in conflict resolution training and leadership development.

According to the latest census data, Holmes County is 79 percent African American and the per capita income there is \$10,683. The main source of income for the majority of Holmes County families are social services benefits. There is a 20 percent unemployment rate in the county and African Americans make up 99 percent of the public school population

Marguerite Casey Foundation general support funding will help CCRC to continue the work of community organizing and activism to reform the public school system in Holmes County, Mississippi.



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Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County

Concerned Citizens

Formed in 1993, Concerned Citizens conducts grassroots leadership development, education and training in Tunica County. By developing the leadership and organizing skills of their constituents, Concerned Citizens hopes to help the community effectively participate in the public policy decision-making process. The goal; to impact educational, economic, political, environmental and social change systems in Tunica County to create first-rate quality public educational opportunity for all families in the county.

Concerned Citizens primary activities are youth leadership development (Tunica Teens in Action), democracy organizing (Community as Policy Makers), and education reform and coalition building. The priorities of current Tunica Teens in Action members include drug awareness and prevention, conflict resolution, videography and the planning of the 2nd Annual Youth Summit in the Delta. Community as Policy Makers aim to keep their community engaged while holding their policy makers accountable. Concerned Citizens' education reform and coalition building work is focused on increasing student test scores in Tunica public schools, holding Mississippi State Department of Education and local school boards accountable, and working with community and youth to keeping students out of the criminal justice system.

Marguerite Casey Foundation general support funding will allow Concerned Citizens to continue its efforts to develop youth leaders and engage the community in efforts to reform the local public schools.