



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact:  
Rahul K. Gupta  
Communications Officer  
(206) 691-3134  
rgupta@caseygrants.org

**MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION INTENSIFIES SUPPORT  
FOR BROAD-BASED EFFORTS TO MOBILIZE FAMILIES**

**\$1.38 Million to Groups Organizing Families to Fight for  
Basic Services and Human Rights**

SEATTLE– In an effort to infuse necessary funding into the fight for basic human needs for safety, economic opportunities, the Marguerite Casey Foundation announced \$1.38 million to organizations spanning four counties in the Rio Grande Valley.

“Without question, this region of Texas is in dire need of resources and of families willing to take the lead in changing conditions they face,” says Luz Vega-Marquis, President/ CEO of the Marguerite Casey Foundation. “It is a region where the larger effects of globalization and state political systems affect low-income families in severe and often caustic ways.”

“These organizations are both cornerstones and trailblazers in this region of Texas,” says Luz Vega-Marquis. “The situation in these four border-counties demands developing new strategies in funding low-income families to create grassroots change.”

The four counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy are characterized by high rates of poverty, and high rates of unemployment and underemployment. The region has long been an agricultural and livestock dependent area, and the limited employment gains made recently are in construction, retail and health care services. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the region has the lowest level of educational attainment in the United States.

“Factors cited are lack of qualified teachers, low income, high dropout rates, and language barriers. Communities on both sides of the border are facing acute problems related to inadequate social services and infrastructure, low wages and high unemployment creating an environment where human rights and women’s rights are suffering,” says Vega-Marquis. “Rapid, unplanned growth is causing devastating environmental impacts, including water shortages and pollution.”



“The rise of colonia communities reflects the rapid unplanned growth along the U.S./Mexico border,” says Vega-Marquis. The Texas Water Development Board estimates that 400,000 Texans live in more than 1,500 colonias in the state, an estimated 200,000 of which are living in these four counties. Colonias can be found in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, where Texas has both the largest number of colonias and the largest colonia population.

In 1994, the four-county region was declared an Empowerment Zone, resulting in an infusion of government and private funding over the past ten years estimated at more than \$400 million. The involvement of Marguerite Casey Foundation at this time would make a significant difference by leveraging more resources to the area and encouraging community organizations to integrate activism and organizing into their programs.

Marguerite Casey Foundation began funding in Texas and other southern states in 2002, “We at the Foundation have found the perseverance of Texan 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, 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 for all. 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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# Brownsville Community Health Center

## BCHC

Founded in 1972, the mission of BCHC is to provide comprehensive primary health care, education and training with an emphasis on advocating for access to quality health services. Established as a direct response to the lack of health services to Latinos in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, BCHC rose to meet the overwhelming needs of those that were denied access to emergency and trauma services by the major Brownsville hospitals and clinics in the region.

Today, BCHC operates a main clinic, two school-based sites and two satellite clinics that serve 20,000 low-income individuals annually. In addition to its array of services, BCHC has incorporated the use of promotoras (peer educators) into the practice to provide health care, to offer prevention strategies, to empower women through leadership development and advocacy, and to raise awareness among immigrant families of their rights and the resources available to them.

BCHC was instrumental in changing the policies of local hospitals that had refused to serve immigrants. As a result of BCHC's advocacy, local hospitals changed their policies and now serve over 3,500 immigrants each year, directly improving the well-being of immigrants and their families.

Marguerite Casey Foundation general support funding will help BCHC expand efforts to develop leadership skills among staff and community members to better identify and address concerns facing the health and well-being of Brownsvilles immigrant populations.



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# Community Action Council of South Texas

## CACST

CACST was chartered in 1965 to provide social services to Starr County, Texas, which is one of the poorest counties in the U.S. and where nearly 60 percent of the population is under the age of 25. Today, CACST's mission is to maintain a comprehensive human services network in Duval, Jim Hogg, Starr County, and Zapata Counties, and is geared towards helping people to become self-sufficient. CACST combines services, education, outreach and advocacy efforts to meet basic needs of families and to work for systemic change.

The only organization in the area with community based programs, makes it the center for family resources and opportunities to become involved in efforts to create change. CACST recently made an institutional decision to move beyond social services by launching community organizing and advocacy programs, recognizing that it must offer more than social services to change the economic, political and educational structures that lead to family destabilization and issues that create the need for CACST's social service programs in the first place.

Advocacy efforts include collaborating with local families and organizations to convince the Texas State Legislature to provide utilities in targeted colonias; opposing the proposed move of Head Start to the U.S. Department of Education and restoring the System Benefit Fund to finance weatherization assistance.

Marguerite Casey Foundation supports CACST in expanding its youth development efforts to include advocacy and leadership development, peer education and outreach programs to engage youth in leadership development and advocacy.



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# Colonias Unidas

## Colonias Unidas

Local residents founded Colonias Unidas in 1989 in an attempt to address poverty, the lack of resources, the lack of basic infrastructure, and the lack of governmental assistance in the colonias of Starr County, Texas. The mission of Colonias Unidas is to empower local residents and their children to become active and educated participants in a democratic society. Colonias Unidas has focused on securing decent living conditions and improved educational opportunities to stabilize families and to work for a better future for community members.

The target community of Colonias Unidas is extremely poor and lacks access to basic resources, reflecting the general hardships of colonias. The average per capita annual income in Las Lomas, Starr County's central colonia, is only \$3,877. Only 18.8 percent of its children graduate from high school.

Colonias Unidas' past accomplishments include advocating for the approval of a \$3.2 million project to bring water and sewer services to the colonia of Las Lomas, bringing electricity service to isolated colonias, convincing private companies to extend garbage collection services to colonias, advocating for and securing expanded educational opportunities for adults and children.

Current programs include an after school youth program focused on academic achievement, a supporting parents with becoming involved in their children's educational experience, women's leadership program, environmental awareness, computer literacy and English as a Second Language classes. The programs offer community members opportunities to improve their well-being and the stability of their families, and to become involved in family advocacy efforts.

Marguerite Casey Foundation supports Colonias Unidas in its community organizing campaigns to secure basic services for residents of colonias through leadership development of community members and growing the capacity of the organization.



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# Su Casa de Esperanza

## Su Casa

Founded in 1982, the mission of Su Casa is to improve the quality of life of children through faith-based programming. Su Casa's vision is to improve the spiritual, emotional, physical, economic, intellectual and social well-being of families in South Texas.

Su Casa primarily works with residents of colonias. Its target population is mostly Latino and immigrant. The average annual income of the families served is \$12,000 and most adults have not completed high school. Su Casa emphasizes meeting the needs and development of women. In its community, 48 percent of women do not receive prenatal care, placing them at increased risk of having problems in their pregnancy and their babies at increased risk of health problems. Su Casa has focused on providing outreach and education to address prenatal health issues and infant care, and has expanded its programs to address other issues affecting family stability.

Su Casa maintains an Early Childhood Development Program, which focuses on prenatal care and early childhood development support, and a Life Skills Programs, which helps families to participate more fully in the economic and social life of the community. From its inception, Su Casa has emphasized strengthening families by providing tools and opportunities for them to become healthier and more stable. Su Casa is one of the only agencies working in colonias that provides resources that are designed for single mothers.

Marguerite Casey Foundation supports Su Casa's efforts to expand the organization's advocacy efforts to address health and family stability issues.



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# Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid

## TRLA

Established in 1970, TRLA provides free civil legal services, organizing opportunities and advocacy on behalf of nearly two million low-income families in a 68-county service area that covers the southwestern third of Texas, including the entire Lower Rio Grande Valley sub-region. In 2004, TRLA helped nearly 20,000 families with such issues as obtaining decent housing, recouping losses to unscrupulous vendors, and starting small businesses. TRLA works with other organizations to educate low-income residents about their rights and protections.

TRLA has been instrumental in establishing and sustaining two resident-based non-profit groups in Alamo that are dedicated to providing decent and affordable housing to colonia residents along the border: La Gloria Development Corporation and Proyecto Azteca. In addition, TRLA has assisted with the development of Tejas Community Credit Opportunity, a non-profit serving the needs of colonia residents. With TRLA's help, these organizations have designed and implemented self-help housing programs through which low-income families build and purchase their own homes.

Through its BASTA project, which is designed to address financial literacy and consumer rights issues, TRLA works with organizations that already exist, and supports the organizing efforts of families in colonias where organizations do not exist. TRLA plans to hire colonia residents, train them and support them to identify organizations and organizers who will be responsible for responding to the needs of residents around financial literacy issues.

Marguerite Casey Foundation supports TRLA to engage low-income residents to build a sustainable organization to promote financial literacy and awareness of consumer rights in the colonias.