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Children's Defense Fund Deepens Commitment to Building Power for Children and Youth

\$6 million from new gifts will support expansion of national Movement Building work

Washington, D.C. -- The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is deepening its efforts to organize and mobilize communities throughout the U.S. to build power for children and families with new initiatives focused on students and faith communities. The programs are made possible by new multi-year funding commitments, including a \$5 million anonymous gift and a \$1 million grant from the Lilly Endowment.

"Ongoing efforts to train, equip, and mobilize youth, young adults, and community leaders to organize and take action around critical issues facing children undergirds all of CDF's work," said Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson, President and CEO of the Children's Defense Fund. "Our movement building approach incorporates leadership development, targeted organizing, convening and capacity building for child well-being and racial justice informed by the life experiences of children and youth."

Each year, the Children's Defense Fund trains more than 1,300 youth and young adults for service and civic engagement. Thirty years ago, the organization launched its most ambitious effort in the arena, the Black Student Leadership Network. The program nurtured a wide range of multi-sector leaders, from the Honorable Kim Janey, Boston's first Black and first woman mayor, to Dr. Dorian Warren, co-president of national power-building group Community Change, and Marty Rodgers, CDF's board treasurer and Market Leader for the US South for Accenture.

With the five-year, \$5 million investment CDF will align the experiential training opportunities of core programs in its portfolio, reconvene, and revitalize this signature network effort on the occasion of its 30th anniversary, marshaling its alumni to participate in the development of youth in current programs. The organization will also convene and train campus leaders from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This body of work will be led by Karissa Anderson, MSW, CDF's National Organizer for Students and Youth, and former Advocacy Director for the Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis.

CDF's religious organizing growth is supported by the Thriving Congregations program of the Indiana-based Lilly Endowment. The purpose of the national initiative is to "strengthen congregations so they can help people deepen their relationships with God, enhance their connections with each other, and contribute to the flourishing of their local communities and the world." For its part, CDF will pilot a collaborative, cohort-based capacity building program with denominationally and racially diverse congregations committed to advancing child well-being in their communities.

Through a series of retreats, virtual workshops, and convenings at its historic Alex Haley Farm, leaders will reflect on their faith commitments, explore critical issues facing youth in their contexts of ministry, and develop practices for addressing these concerns. Glen Vinson Jr. - who previously served as Program Director of the Faith and Politics Institute and as Associate Dean for Religious and Civic Engagement at Howard University - joined CDF in June as National Organizer for Faith Communities and will guide this effort. The Rev. Cherisna Jean-Marie, Director of Leadership Development and Organizing, oversees both efforts in her management of the Leadership Development and Organizing team, which also includes the program staff at Haley Farm.

“Movements are created out of intentionality,” noted Catoya Roberts, National Director for Movement Building at CDF, who came to the organization from posts leading National Campaign for The Advancement Project and state efforts in Wisconsin for the Gamaliel Network. “They take time to be built and time to see the fruits of the labor. We have to be willing to take the time to be in relationship with people and to create with people, with the intention that ultimately, we build something beautiful and amazing that will last for generations to come.”

In addition to the Leadership Development and Organizing team, Roberts coordinates the work of CDF’s state and territorial offices in CA, TX, MN, OH, NY and the Southern Regional Office. Roberts is currently working with leaders in the offices to examine how CDF is developing its bases - children, parents, young people, faith-based organizations, alums of CDF, and organizations - for alignment of mobilization strategies. CDF hopes to deepen each location’s connection to people on the ground and coordinate efforts with the various coalitions within which CDF is active. The ultimate goal is to ensure the organization’s historic, bold, and effective voice for children is amplifying and reflecting the needs of families at local, state, and federal levels.

Students, faith communities, or community-based organizations who would like to join CDF or get more information about its growing Movement Building work should contact movementbuilding@childrensdefense.org.

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About CDF: The Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit child advocacy organization that has worked relentlessly for more than 40 years to ensure a level playing field for all children. We champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty; protect them from abuse and neglect; and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and a moral and spiritual foundation. Supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations, CDF advocates nationwide on behalf of children to ensure children are always a priority. Learn more at www.childrensdefense.org.