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### **Junior Leagues of Florida Host Tallahassee Advocacy Conference**

The Junior Leagues of Florida State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC) delegates gathered in February in preparation for the 2009 Legislative Session for its Winter Advocacy Conference in Tallahassee. 25 representatives from the Junior Leagues of Florida attended presentations by a series of policy experts including two distinguished members of the Florida Senate.

The event was organized with the assistance of Legislative Analyst Charlotte Mather, JL Ft. Lauderdale member, and longtime child advocate, Jack Levine for the purpose of guiding delegates advocacy efforts of SPAC's three legislative priorities for 2009:

(1) preserving funding for foster care programs; (2) booster seat legislation for kids ages 4-8; and (3) the Girls Advocacy Project (GAP).

"We hope to energize our members here and in our home Leagues with this training and information. We know in these tough economic times, our advocacy efforts are vital to ensure the well being of women, children and families of Florida," said SPAC Chair-elect Jenay Iurato, of JL Tampa.

Budget consultant and former Director of Planning and Budgeting for Governors Graham and Martinez Glenn Robertson discussed the bleak reality of Florida's revenue forecasts but stated that "if advocates can prove that their priorities make both budgetary and humanitarian sense, they are more likely to get a positive response from governmental leaders."

Mike Cusick, CEO of the Florida Coalition for Children [www.flchildren.org](http://www.flchildren.org) and Deborah Moore of the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program [www.guardianadlitem.org](http://www.guardianadlitem.org) both presented key information on the value of using innovation to improve our state's Foster Care system from both the prevention and quality of service positions. The vital link of planning for foster youth transitions to adulthood was emphasized. Doug Sessions, CEO of the Ounce of Prevention Fund [www.ounce.org](http://www.ounce.org), shared his thoughts on the critical need to invest in Healthy Families and other programs that avoid more costly interventions later.

In addition, Linda Alexionok representing the Children's Campaign, Inc. [www.iamforkids.org](http://www.iamforkids.org) emphasized the importance of bringing a diverse group of voices representing the business, civic and community sectors into the advocacy arena. Linda gave credit to the Junior Leagues for their support of GAP, assisting girls in the delinquency system, and the tradition of blending direct volunteer action with public policy advocacy. Audrey Schiebler, one of Florida's true child advocate heroes and Junior League member since the 1960's shared her thoughts about how to nurture a new generation of civic leadership. "Never think that today's problems cannot be solved. Creativity and commitment are always timely, and there is no better organization for women to channel those talents than Junior League," said Audrey.

State Senators Nan Rich of Broward County and Thad Altman of Brevard County were lunch speakers who advocated their respective priorities in concert with SPAC's key issues. Senator Rich asserted that foster children and teens in the delinquency system benefit greatly from advocates who understand that access to health, mental health, education and life skills are essential for success. Senator Altman, the lead sponsor of the booster seat legislation, stated how important it is for parents/caregivers to know how to save their children's lives and prevent injury by utilizing safe restraints in vehicles.

The State of Florida boasts 24 Junior Leagues, with combined membership of over 11,000 women. SPAC has been the advocacy arm of the Junior Leagues of Florida for over 30 years, monitoring the state legislative process and addressing issues of political importance to the members & community projects of the Junior Leagues in the state. Each Florida Junior League that chooses to participate in the advocacy process sends delegates to state meetings and conferences throughout the year to research and debate the issues of the day.

The Junior Leagues of Florida have weighed in on various topics, including bicycle helmets for children under 16, the Environmental Growth Management Act of 1995, the '911' Emergency Medical System, child abuse, domestic violence, juvenile justice, and education. For more information visit [www.jflfspac.org](http://www.jflfspac.org).

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