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Budget Supports People with Disabilities

TALLAHASSEE - Jane Johnson, Director for the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), today announced her support for the Fiscal Year 2008-09 budget recommendations proposed by Governor Charlie Crist and Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp. The budget will allow for people with developmental disabilities to continue to receive needed services through APD.

"I am thankful to Governor Crist and Lt. Governor Kottkamp for acknowledging the importance of addressing the needs of Floridians with developmental disabilities by funding the Medicaid waiver programs," Director Johnson said. "In a tight budget year, we appreciate the Governor's commitment to Florida's vulnerable citizens. Our agency's goal is to provide Floridians with needed services so they may continue to be contributing members of their community. Governor Crist's recommended budget will help us achieve this objective."

Currently APD serves approximately 35,000 Floridians with developmental disabilities. Of those citizens, more than 25,000 are currently enrolled in the Home and Community-Based Services Medicaid Waiver. The waiver allows them to receive services to support living in their community. The proposed budget includes \$24 million in state funds to replace nonrecurring funds that were in last year's APD budget. This money will be matched by the federal government, providing \$54 million to the agency which will allow APD to continue serving individuals through the Medicaid waiver at current levels.

The Governor is also recommending \$5.9 million to serve approximately 250 individuals with developmental disabilities who are expected to qualify for a crisis designation in the next year. People in crisis are those who are a danger to themselves and others, are homeless, or no longer have someone to care for them and they require immediate services.

Money also has been earmarked to increase staffing ratios at the Mentally Retarded Defendant Program (MRDP). MRDP houses approximately 200 people who have been accused of felony crimes but determined incompetent to stand trial due to their disabilities and by law must be placed in a secure facility. The Governor's budget includes \$1.3 million to hire 74 employees to enhance security at the facility in Chattahoochee.

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REMINDER FOR MEDIA---When reporting on stories about people with disabilities, remember to use language that puts the person first, rather than the disability. For example, use phrases such as "persons with disabilities" (instead of "the disabled") and "person who uses a wheelchair" (rather than "wheelchair bound").

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