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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A BLUEPRINT FOR THE NEEDS OF NJ ADULTS WITH AUTISM UNVEILED AT STATE HOUSE

(Trenton, NJ) December 14, 2006. A State House press conference today highlighted recommendations to New Jersey's service delivery system to better respond to the critical needs of New Jersey adults with autism. According to Centers for Disease Control statistics, autism affects 1 in 166 children. In New Jersey, it is estimated that approximately 50,000 people have an autism spectrum disorder.

The recommendations stem from a White Paper, "*Meeting the Needs of Adults with Autism: A Blueprint for the Future*," presented by the New Jersey Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community (COSAC), the state's autism resource for 41 years. Amid a crowd of families affected by autism, legislators, public officials and autism professionals, COSAC challenged the state's leaders to dramatically improve the delivery of supports and services for adults with autism, a lifelong disability for which there is no known cause or cure.

"This report is a crucial first step in generating a public dialogue to better respond to the increasing numbers of adults affected by autism," said Paul Potito, COSAC Executive Director. COSAC anticipates that the report will effect systemic change to the current barriers in employment as well as residential and community living options, which prevent adults with autism from reaching their full potential.

"Since its inception in 2004, COSAC's Adult Resources Initiative (ARI) has focused its attention on the need for a more cost-effective funding mechanism and efficient service delivery system for adults on the autism spectrum," said Leslie Long, COSAC's Director of Adult Resources "Children with autism will inevitably become adults with autism, which is why raising awareness of this crisis at this time is imperative," Long said.

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Senator Ellen Karcher (D-Monmouth/Mercer), Vice Chair of the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee, stressed the importance of the COSAC report. "When special education entitlements end at age 21, families of individuals with autism face an adult service system that is extremely difficult to navigate and does not adequately address the needs of adults with autism," Karcher said. "We all need to work together to create a seamless, transparent statewide system that maximizes state and federal dollars," Senator Karcher said.

"I can tell you first hand, that the impact on families living with a loved one affected by autism can be an overwhelming experience," said Senator Weinberg (D-Bergen), whose 14 year-old step-grandson has an autism spectrum disorder. "New Jersey needs to take a more proactive approach to improving the opportunities for adults with autism, as well as to plan for the future for those children and young adults with autism who will soon be entering adulthood. This report, for the first time, gives New Jersey leaders a roadmap to address what is now being acknowledged as a national problem."

The COSAC report highlights the need for a more coordinated and enhanced system of services and supports for adults with autism. COSAC pledged its support to work with the Legislature, the Corzine administration and the autism community to design a model program by developing a more cost-effective use of state and federal matching funds. This will have an immediate impact toward addressing the current needs of adults with autism as well as provide a long-term solution for thousands of New Jersey families.

For a copy of the report, visit www.njcosac.org, or call COSAC's Adult Resources Department at 609-883-5411.

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COSAC is a nonprofit agency providing information and advocacy, services, family and professional education, and consultation. COSAC encourages responsible basic and applied research that would lead to a lessening of the effects and potential prevention of autism. COSAC is dedicated to ensuring that all people with autism receive appropriate, effective services to maximize their growth potential, and to enhancing the overall awareness of autism in the general public.