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**Marguerite Casey Foundation Unveils
2012 Equal Voice Family Platform and Policy Recommendations
*Report Cites Recession Has Changed Little for Poor Families***

LOS ANGELES—Just as politicians are ramping up for the fall elections, Marguerite Casey Foundation unveiled, and families ratified, the 2012 Equal Voice National Family Platform in Los Angeles on July 23, 2012 – a report outlining the issue and policy priorities of 6,000 poor families surveyed from Alabama to California. The issue that the families – 55 percent of whom live on less than \$25,000 a year – cited as their top priority? Education.

“To hear politicians and pundits tell it, poor families want only one thing – more government programs. But, ask poor people what they need to improve their economic situation, and they will say a voice in the decision-making process,” said Luz Vega-Marquis, president and CEO of Marguerite Casey Foundation. “Poor people are *spoken for, to* and *about* but they’re never *asked* for their opinion about the issues or the policies that affect their lives.

“The Equal Voice national platform represents not only the voices of 6,000 families, but also begins to give voice to the 49 million people who live in poverty today,” said Vega-Marquis. “What this platform shows is that for all families the road to prosperity begins with a good education.”

A recent study by the U.S. Census Bureau showed that the lifetime earnings of someone with a master’s degree are \$1.3 million more than someone with a high school diploma. Vega-Marquis noted, “Our report shows that no matter your income level or political affiliation – every issue is a family issue.”

“The power of this platform is that it was created *by* poor working families, *for* families,” continued Vega-Marquis. “This spring, through an online convention, via social media, and at in-person gatherings large and small, we did something rarely done in this country – we *asked families* what they need to thrive. In between working two jobs and struggling to meet their families’ daily needs, they responded. The question is who will listen? ”

Of the 6,000 people who participated in the surveys, gatherings and online convention, Latinos were the largest segment of respondents (68 percent), followed by African-Americans (12 percent) and whites (11 percent). Six percent were of Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American/Alaska Native descent. The families were poor before the recession, and they still are. Yet, counter to public opinion, 66 percent of them take an active role in improving their communities and the lives of their families — volunteering, connecting with neighbors to identify solutions to community problems, and contacting elected officials about issues that affect their lives.

With the belief that only a family-led movement will lift families out of poverty, Seattle-based Marguerite Casey Foundation's funds organizations who seek to support a constituency of civically engaged families who can advocate in their own behalf. Equal Voice is the voice of families and a barometer by which to measure the progress made on issues affecting poor families.

Unique in the world of philanthropy, the foundation facilitates strategies like the 2012 Equal Voice National Family Convention. The foundation's efforts have already spawned the online newspaper *Equal Voice* <http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/>, a documentary film, a youth civic engagement project, and more than 30 Equal Voice networks for community engagement nationwide.

To support the strategy of a family-led movement for change, the foundation has filled its board of directors with renowned leaders, including its chair, Freeman A. Hrabowski, III, president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County and recently named one of *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World. Dr. Hrabowski was the keynote speaker.

Issues included in the 2012 Equal Voice National Family Platform

Education
Immigration Reform
Health Care
Employment / Job Training
Housing
Child Care
Criminal Justice Reform
Food Security / Access to Healthy Food
Environmental Issues
LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Rights
Transportation
Elder Care
Youth Engagement