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## **CROWELL & MORING PRO BONO: DC APPLESEED URGES NEW DIRECTION FOR DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S CHILD SUPPORT SYSTEM**

Washington, D.C. August 23, 2007 – The District of Columbia's child support system is failing tens of thousands of District children. In 2006, more than 76,000 children (under age 18) were part of the child support system – more kids than are enrolled in the D.C. Public Schools and charter schools combined. But the system is not living up to its promise for three out of four District children on its caseload. At least 58,000 children eligible for support received no money at all.

In light of these circumstances, at the invitation of the D.C. Office of Attorney General, DC Appleseed, Kilpatrick Stockton, LLP and Crowell & Moring LLP, conducted a two-year investigation of the system to examine the roots of the District government's child support crisis.

The investigation concludes that the District's child support model is primarily a punitive one designed to identify and sanction "deadbeat dads" when, based on the demographics of the District, it needs a constructive model designed to assist "dead broke dads" to meet their financial and other parental obligations.

DC Appleseed found that despite modest improvements in the District's child support program, the city continues to fall significantly below the national average on key indicators including: rates of establishing child support orders; collecting on past-due child support payments; establishing paternity; and cost effectiveness.

The report includes several recommendations to improve the current situation. Primarily, the District's child support system should use the leverage it has to help parents overcome the barriers they face to paying child support, whether those barriers are related to employment, criminal justice involvement, immigration or family relationships. In short, the child support office of the Attorney General should move from sometimes being an inflexible and punitive agency to one that is a resource for families and children.

With the appropriate commitment, the District and the courts can significantly improve the performance of the child support system. The recommendations contained in the report are but a first step. DC

Appleseed is prepared to assist in implementation of the recommendations in the report and to join with District leaders, the courts, community-based organizations and others in this important effort.

A full version of the report, *Taking Care of the District's Children: The Need to Reform D.C.'s Child Support System*, is available at [www.dcappleseed.org](http://www.dcappleseed.org).

The Crowell & Moring LLP team included Marc F. Efron, John E. McCarthy, Jr., Shauna E. Alonge, Linda S. Bruggeman, Amy Laderberg O'Sullivan, and Denise O. Giardina.

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