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**NEW YORK CITY AWARDED NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES' 2010 GOLD
AWARD FOR MUNICIPAL EXCELLENCE**

***Department of Consumer Affairs' Network of Financial Empowerment Centers
Wins National Prize***

The National League of Cities (NLC) announced today that New York City has won a 2010 Gold Award for Municipal Excellence. The Award, in the category of cities with a population of more than 500,000, went to the Department of Consumer Affairs' (DCA) Financial Empowerment Centers as an outstanding program that improves the quality of life in America's communities. DCA's network of more than 20 Financial Empowerment Centers provide free, one-on-one, multilingual professional financial counseling to New York City residents.

"During these tough economic times, New Yorkers have a place to turn for free one-on-one help with their personal finances. New York City's Financial Empowerment Center counselors have helped New Yorkers in need reduce their debt levels by over \$3 million, and helped thousands open savings accounts with deposits that have generated nearly \$300,000 in savings," said New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. "The National League of Cities' Gold Award for Municipal Excellence honors the innovative strides we have made to help residents take control of their financial lives. Thanks to the ambitious work of our Department of Consumer Affairs, we now have more than 20 Financial Empowerment Centers. Consumer Affairs Commissioner Jonathan Mintz and I would like to thank the National League of Cities for selecting New York to receive the Municipal Excellence Award."

NLC received nominations from cities and towns in 40 states. Finalist programs exhibited exceptional public-private partnerships, productive citizen and community collaborations, management of municipal resources, implementation of government policies, project implementation with tangible results and/or the ability to replicate the project in other cities.

"We congratulate New York City and its Financial Empowerment Center initiative for receiving an Award for Municipal Excellence," said NLC Executive Director Donald J. Borut. "New York's program has improved the quality of life for all citizens by developing a creative solution to a pressing local problem."

"New York City's Financial Empowerment Centers are proving that whether you make \$15,000 or \$150,000, there's no substitute for sitting down one-on-one with a professional financial counselor," said NYC Department of Consumer Affairs Commissioner Jonathan Mintz. "Our financial counselors have successfully been able to improve New Yorkers' financial situations with quantifiable results. We're grateful to the National League of Cities for the recognition of our ambitious, yet incredibly successful, program."

Financial Empowerment Centers provide "gold standard" one-on-one professional financial counseling for free in high-need communities. Counseling is available in person or by phone in English, Spanish and Chinese. Citywide, the Centers meet the demand for individualized counseling identified in the agency's [*Neighborhood Financial Services Study*](#), which was released in June 2008, and reflect the Bloomberg Administration's aggressive efforts to fight poverty.

The City's network of Financial Empowerment Centers is administered by the

Department of Consumer Affairs' Office of Financial Empowerment, the first initiative of Mayor Bloomberg's Center for Economic Opportunity. The Centers help New Yorkers with money management, budgeting, credit counseling, negotiating with creditors, finding affordable banking services, managing debt, government benefit screenings and referrals to other services and organizations. The pilot Financial Empowerment Center opened in the Bronx in June 2008, followed by three more Centers in May 2009 to meet increasing demand in the face of the nation's fiscal crisis. Today, there are more than 20 Financial Empowerment Center locations in the City. Since Centers opened, financial counselors have conducted more than 13,000 counseling sessions and helped New York City residents pay down more than \$3 million in debt.

Financial Empowerment Centers are supported by the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City, which serves as an umbrella not-for-profit organization that was established to strengthen public programs serving the needs and general welfare of New Yorkers. Through private-sector contributions, the Mayor's Fund supports many of the City's initiatives. Financial Empowerment Centers are operated in partnership with Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Credit Where Credit Is Due, The Financial Clinic and Phipps Community Development Corporation. 2010 Financial Empowerment Center funding was provided by Citi, Citi Foundation, Capital One, Goldman Sachs, H&R Block, Bank of New York Mellon, NeighborWorks America, FB Heron Foundation, Single Stop USA, Verizon, Con Ed, M&T Bank, and Fidelity Investments.

The [National League of Cities](#) is the nation's oldest and largest organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans.

The Department of Consumer Affairs' Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE) is the first municipal office of its kind in the nation with a mission to educate, empower and protect New Yorkers with low incomes. OFE administers a citywide network of Financial Empowerment Centers and seeks to increase access to high-quality, low-cost financial education and counseling; improve access to income-boosting tax credits; connect households to safe and affordable banking and asset-building products and services; and enforce and improve consumer protections to help New Yorkers make the best use of their financial resources to move forward economically. For more information, visit DCA online at nyc.gov/consumers or call 311 in New York City or 212-NEW YORK outside of the City. New York City is also a founding member of the Cities for Financial Empowerment (CFE) Coalition, which works with key partners in the public, private and nonprofit sectors to mobilize their collective power to advance the financial empowerment agenda on a state and national level. For more information, please visit cfecoalition.org.