

May 11, 2009

**MAYOR BLOOMBERG OPENS THREE NEW FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT CENTERS IN BROOKLYN,
MANHATTAN AND QUEENS**

*Free, One-On-One Financial Coaching Now Available for All City Residents as Part of the City's
Five Borough Economic Opportunity Plan*

Financial Empowerment Key Component of City's Anti-Poverty Strategy

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg today opened three new Financial Empowerment Centers which will offer free, one-on-one financial education and counseling to low-income New York City residents. An important tool in the City's *Five Borough Economic Opportunity Plan*, the new Financial Empowerment Centers located in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens follow the successful pilot center in the Bronx launched by Mayor Bloomberg last summer. At a time when many New Yorkers are finding it harder to make ends meet, the counselors at the City's Financial Empowerment Centers will help with money management, budgeting, financial planning, credit counseling, negotiating with creditors, finding affordable banking services, government benefit screenings and referrals to other services and organizations. Counseling services are also offered in Spanish. The new Financial Empowerment Centers, administered by the [Department of Consumer Affairs' Office of Financial Empowerment](#) and part of the City's anti-poverty strategy under the Center for Economic Opportunity, are part of the Mayor's 18 initiatives announced last fall to provide targeted relief to the City's most vulnerable populations during these difficult economic times. Private funding for the new centers was raised by the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City. The Mayor was joined at the announcement by Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Linda Gibbs, Consumer Affairs Commissioner Jonathan Mintz, Office of Financial Empowerment Executive Director Cathie Mahon, Senior Vice President for Global Community Relations at Citi Eric Eve, and Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation President Colvin Grannum.

"Families that find themselves in economic distress and don't know where to turn for help are more likely to make bad financial decisions at the worst possible time," said Mayor Bloomberg. "In October we launched 18 initiatives to help families get through the economic crisis, including expanding our Financial Empowerment Center model, which has done a great job of helping residents in the Bronx manage their credit, debts, and personal finances. These new centers, which are part of our *Five Borough Economic Opportunity Plan*, can help more families change those odds."

"The Office of Financial Empowerment is one of the [Center for Economic Opportunity's](#) most promising innovations," said Deputy Mayor for [Health and Human Services](#) Linda I. Gibbs. "The high cost of being poor is exacerbated by a lack of access to financial education services or supports. Our Financial Empowerment Centers are taking that challenge head on by providing critical advice, at the community level, about how to maximize earnings and plan for a better financial future."

The City's first Financial Empowerment Center is located at the Phipps Opportunity Center in the Bronx. The pilot center currently has one full-time and one part-time counselor who have conducted 464 counseling sessions for 250 people in the Bronx. Over 60 percent of clients who visited the Bronx pilot center were able to review their credit reports with the counselor and begin working on addressing credit issues, negotiating reduced payments with creditors and paying down debt. Each new center is expected to have three full-time counselors who will conduct approximately 6,000 counseling sessions city-wide per year.

The new centers announced today are co-located at Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation's Restoration Plaza in Brooklyn, the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation in Washington Heights, and Catholic Charities/HomeBase location in Jamaica. The new centers will also include mobile, satellite offices to better meet the needs of residents. City residents can call 311 or visit www.nyc.gov for hours of operations and addresses.

Private funders for the three Centers include: Citibank, Capital One, H&R Block, F.B. Heron Foundation, Jackson Hewitt and Corporate Fuel Advisors. The Mayor's Fund is currently seeking funding to support two additional Financial Empowerment Centers expected to open later this year.

"The City's Financial Empowerment Center counselors are helping one New Yorker after another get out of debt, budget their expenses, and start saving money for their futures," said Consumer Affairs Commissioner Jonathan Mintz. "This individualized approach, free in Financial Empowerment Centers now spread across the City, is the gold standard when it comes to taking control of your finances."

"Providing families and individuals with the fundamental knowledge and tools needed to manage their financial lives is one of Citi's highest priorities," said Eric Eve, Senior Vice President for Global Community Relations at Citi. "Citi is proud to work with Mayor Bloomberg and our community partners to enable New Yorkers to make informed and constructive financial decisions."

"Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation applauds the City for its groundbreaking approach to assisting New Yorkers in gaining financial management skills and better managing their personal financial resources," said Colvin Grannum, Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation President. "Knowing how to conserve personal income, invest prudently and leverage credit wisely are essential skills for maintaining family economic stability in a city, like New York, where people work extremely hard to earn income and the cost of living is high, Restoration is pleased to partner with the City and the Department of Consumer Affairs to make available to everyday New Yorkers indispensable resources for the advancement of working families."

The Office of Financial Empowerment, which runs the centers, is one of eleven anti-poverty initiatives under the Center for Economic Opportunity that Mayor Bloomberg recently named successful or promising in a speech delivered at the Center for American Progress in Washington, DC. It supports asset building, financial education, and protection from predatory practices for low-income New Yorkers through a wide array of innovative projects. The Office of Financial Empowerment is leading a national coalition, Cities for Financial Empowerment, and members are replicating several of its research and programmatic initiatives, such as a study of how low-income households use financial services, a network of financial education providers, and new financial services for low-income households. Senator Charles Schumer (D- New York) recently introduced legislation that would establish a similar entity at the Federal level.

The Office of Financial Empowerment encourages City residents to seek financial counseling at the centers if they are unable to:

- Pay the minimum balance of their credit card or loan each month
- Decrease the amount they owe, despite paying bills on time
- Keep up with rent or mortgage payments
- Work out repayment plans or negotiate interest rates
- Decide if a debt consolidation loan or bankruptcy is right for them
- Get out of a bad agreement with a credit repair agency
- Manage a budget to save more money

The Mayor also announced the launch of a month-long, public awareness campaign to publicize the City's free financial counseling services. The campaign will include city-wide phone kiosk, subway and bus advertisements, as well as the distribution of 300,000 flyers to community partners.

New Yorkers can also find free and low-cost financial services in the City's online Financial Education Network Directory. The Directory lists free and low-cost financial education classes, workshops, hotlines and one-on-one counseling services available in 15 languages throughout the City. City residents can locate services by borough, language, and topic, online at www.nyc.gov.

The City's *Five Borough Economic Opportunity Plan* is a comprehensive strategy to bring New York City through the current economic downturn as fast as possible. It focuses on three major areas: creating jobs for New Yorkers today, implementing a long-term vision for growing the city's economy, and building

affordable, attractive neighborhoods in every borough. Taken together, the initiatives that the City has launched to achieve these goals will generate thousands of jobs and put New York City on a path to economic recovery and growth. To learn more about the plan, visit www.nyc.gov. Recently, the City announced:

- New MSC Cruises service- more than doubling New York City's international cruise visitors.
- The "Nine in '09" campaign to promote economic activity in diverse neighborhoods.
- Center for Economic Opportunity placed more than 4,000 low-income New Yorkers in jobs.
- Stimulus-funded community development projects that will strengthen neighborhoods.
- Stimulus-funded Housing Authority projects that will create jobs for 3,255 New Yorkers.
- The start of construction of 103 units of affordable housing in Brownsville.
- A plan to protect area character and expand commercial opportunities in Sunset Park.
- The opening of Home Depot in the South Bronx creating 200 new permanent jobs.
- Legislation that will green buildings and create 19,000 construction jobs.
- The latest round of training funds to help small businesses train their employees.
- The final tally of 1,673 additional jobs created at the new Yankee Stadium.
- The placement of 50 laid-off New Yorkers into positions at entrepreneurial companies.
- New York City achieved a record 5,000 job placements through the first quarter of 2009.
- Help for a beer distributor to create 55 permanent and 30 construction jobs in the Bronx.
- Green projects at the Brooklyn Navy Yard are creating more than 1,700 permanent jobs.
- Comprehensive initiatives to support the nonprofit sector and its 490,000 jobs.
- Federal stimulus transportation projects that will create or preserve 32,000 jobs.
- New automated water meter readers that could help businesses retain or create 550 jobs.
- New programs to provide training and resources for City's future entrepreneurs.
- Steps the City is taking to help small businesses adapt to conditions and avoid layoffs.
- More than 50,000 New Yorkers claimed the City's Child Care Tax Credit in its first year.
- 11 new initiatives to support the financial services sector and promote entrepreneurship.
- A plan for Coney Island that will create 6,000 permanent and 25,000 construction jobs.
- A plan to create 400,000 jobs over the next six years in the 2009 State of the City speech.