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**GOVERNOR CORZINE SIGNS RESOLUTION STATING
EVERY YEAR, BEGINNING IN 2009,
OCTOBER IS BLINDNESS AWARENESS MONTH**

**Sponsored by NJ Assemblyman Louis Greenwald
and Assemblywoman Pamela R. Lampitt**

Initiated by The Little Rock Foundation

January 12, 2009 (Voorhees, NJ) –Acknowledging the vital importance of enhancing awareness about the ways to prevent, treat and cure blindness and other serious visual impairments, Governor Corzine recently signed into law a measure designating October of each year as “Blindness Awareness Month” in New Jersey. This resolution will educate the public about eye disease and eye care and ways to address the rising trend of blindness and severe visual impairment.

Sponsored by Assemblyman Louis D. Greenwald and by Assemblywoman Pamela R. Lampitt, both of District 6 (part of Camden County), the resolution was inspired by their friendship with one of their constituents, Rocco Fiorentino, one of the founders of The Little Rock Foundation. Rocco, 12, is blind due to premature birth. The ambassador for The Little Rock Foundation, Rocco is an advocate for all blind and visually impaired children. He is also an accomplished jazz singer and musician who has appeared on “The Today Show” and performed throughout the country.

“Rocco’s story of success in the face of incredible adversity is an inspiration to us all,” said Greenwald. “We are so proud to have worked with him on this critical measure, which will enhance the lives of those living with severe visual impairments.”

“Rocco is a delightful young man who never fails to bring a smile to your face. At the ripe old age of twelve, he is a true role model for overcoming the odds,” said Lampitt. “We hope that Blindness Awareness Month will raise awareness of this important issue.”

The Little Rock Foundation is a non-profit organization named for Rocco who is blind due to retinopathy of prematurity. The Foundation was began in 1997, one year after Rocco was born, because the Fiorentinos understood how difficult it was for parents, like themselves, to raise a child without sight in a world that is focused on seeing.

The Little Rock Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of children who are blind or visually impaired and their families. “It is imperative that all people understand the realities of living without sight,” said Tina Fiorentino, executive director of The Little Rock Foundation. “We are honored that Governor Corzine has recognized the importance of expanding the education of the public and named October as Blindness Awareness Month so that many organizations can work together to build a better world for the blind and visually impaired.”

Tina and Rocco’s son, Rocco, added his enthusiastic response to Governor Corzine’s support of the resolution. He said, “We are very excited about the opportunities we will now have to share the stories of people like me who face life with the challenge of being blind or visually impaired. Maybe we can start here in New Jersey and take this nationwide!”

Some background facts on blindness include:

- Across the globe, a child goes blind every single minute, and some 37 million people are blind and 124 million severely visually impaired.
- The World Health Organization estimates that 75% of all blindness can be treated, cured, or prevented by highly cost-effective means.
- The prevalence of blindness increases rapidly in later years, particularly after age 75; and the number of Americans with age-related eye disease is expected to double within the next three decades unless something is done to reverse the trend, according to EyeCare America, which is the public service foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology
- More than two-thirds of visually impaired adults in the United States are over 65 years of age
- Nearly 20.5 million Americans age 40 and older are afflicted with cataracts, which is the leading cause of blindness in the United States
- The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, in the Department of Human Services, provides services in the area of education, employment, independence, and eye health; and its prevention services program screens more than 45,000 people

annually in all 21 counties, including diabetic eye screenings, adult eye screenings, school screenings, and migrant worker screening.

About The Little Rock Foundation and Rocco, 12:

The Little Rock Foundation was formed in 1997 and named for Rocco Fiorentino, who was then 1 year old. Rocco was born four months premature and weighed 1 ½ lbs. His twin brother died at birth. Rocco had a 3% chance of survival. He left the hospital six months later. Due of the high level of oxygen needed to keep him alive in the incubator, he had one remaining challenge – he became totally blind. Little Rocco, now 12, is an ambassador for The Little Rock Foundation and has championed the cause of blindness and is now an award-winning humanitarian.

Rocco has been recognized by many organizations and recently received the Helen Keller Award of Independence from VIABL in Berks County, PA and he was named a Huggable Hero from Build-A-Bear Workshop. Because of speeches Rocco has given to New Jersey State legislature, \$1.2 million dollars has been dedicated to Braille Education in the State of New Jersey and 50 staff people were able to retain their jobs (after predicted budget cuts that Rocco protested) at the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

The Little Rock Foundation has two family resource centers in Wills Eye Hospital and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Little Rock Scholarship program that gives \$7500 to four individual students each year, Camp Little Rock – a free camp for children who are blind or visually impaired, community events and outreach programs. The foundation hosts a number of fundraising events throughout the year to fund these programs.

Collaborations are encouraged throughout October to celebrate Blindness Awareness Month. Those organizations and individuals interested can find more information about The Little Rock Foundation and Blindness Awareness Month can visit www.tlrf.org, e-mail tina@tlrf.org or call 1-800-877-220-2500.

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