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## **BANK OF AMERICA DONATES \$100,000 OF \$1 MILLION COMMITMENT TO S.C. FIRST STEPS TO SCHOOL READINESS**

**Columbia, S.C.** – As part of a longstanding commitment to improving school readiness for young children in South Carolina, Bank of America has generously donated \$100,000 to South Carolina First Steps. These funds help First Steps deliver much needed services like family literacy, parent support, quality child care and early education to young children and their families across South Carolina. Bank of America pledged \$1 million to First Steps in 2000.

“Bank of America recognizes the impact early childhood education plays in preparing South Carolina’s future citizens for the workforce. Engaging a child in the first few years of life will enrich the quality of life in our community. First Steps plays a critical role in connecting children to quality care and education and Bank of America is proud to be a strong supporter of First Steps,” stated Kim Wilkerson, president for Bank of America South Carolina.

Bank of America’s donation was presented Thursday morning at the 2007 Governor’s Early Childhood Summit Kickoff breakfast. The Summit is a 6-month effort designed to build state public policy recommendations focusing on increased integration and coordination of public and private resources serving South Carolina’s children ages 0-5.

“With this donation, Bank of America has once again proven they are champions for South Carolina’s youngest learners,” said First Steps Director Susan DeVenny. “They have shown their commitment to young children since 2000 – well before Judge Cooper’s recent equity ruling shed light on the importance of early intervention. We are very grateful for their continued support.”

Brain research shows that in the first three years of life, neural connections are formed that are crucial to brain development. Early experiences during these years shape the strength and functioning of children’s brains. Quality experiences for all children, especially for at-risk children, can make a long-term difference in their ability to engage and learn. As such, this is the time when resources yield a high return on investment. In fact, a 2004 Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank study cites a \$17 return for every \$1 invested.

“Partners like Bank of America help us reach children early when assistance makes the most impact,” DeVenny continued. “Their dedication to workforce development begins with our youngest.”

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*South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness ('First Steps') is a comprehensive, results-oriented statewide education initiative to help prepare children to reach school healthy and ready to succeed. Public and private support are combined through county partnerships to enable individual communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families.*

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