

## Speaking Truth to Power



Dr. Gloria Wilder Brathwaite, a nationally recognized advocate for underserved children and a pediatrician for a mobile health unit in Washington, D.C., touched and inspired participants at this year's **Strengthening the Food Resource Safety Net** conference.

As she reflected on her own struggle with childhood poverty, "Dr. Gloria" attributed much of her success to her mother. A single parent of three children in Brooklyn, NY, her mother worked three jobs a day to keep them off welfare. They often were hungry and sick. "Although I was always fat, I was never full. My mother was called a welfare mom, a dead beat . . . I just called her 'mommy'. When I woke up in the morning, whether it was in front of the stove or on the floor in the Cab Company where she worked, mother was always there. If I had been raised today in 2006, my mother would have been reported to child protective service and I would be in foster care. Poverty is no longer socially acceptable. For single mothers who struggle, we often criminalize their inability to care for their children."

Dr. Gloria views healthcare as a basic and fundamental right of every citizen of a democratic society. She lamented the media's celebration of an Oklahoma child who found it necessary to start a lemonade stand in an effort to pay for her own leukemia treatment. "America's healthcare disparities are a symptom of the disease of poverty and injustice." She recalled her excitement as a child at the news of President Johnson's War on Poverty. And she expressed disappointment at the current state of our country where inequality proliferates. "Charity without justice is cruel, but charity with justice is beautiful."

It was from this perspective that Dr. Gloria took issue with Senator Santorum's suggestion earlier in the day that illegal immigrants are the cause of low wages among the working poor (see related article on page 1). "Eighty-five percent of the children in low-income families have at least one parent who is working full-time. I didn't hear Mr. Santorum mention that earlier today." Rather than blaming the difficulties of the working poor on immigration, she pointed to corporate greed and the refusal of government to enact legislation to provide a fair wage and quality healthcare. Why haven't these laws been put in place? "We are struggling with the hypocrisy of our nation. So strong overseas and so weak here at home."

Dr. Gloria stressed that she is not a Democrat, not a Republican and not an Independent. She abhors "political correctness" and is simply an advocate for truth and justice. "My mother taught me to never do what's easy, always do what's right." She left the group with a challenge: "The next time you vote, vote on behalf of the last person to whom you gave a bag of food."