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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Baltimore City Achieves Record Low Tuberculosis Case Rate as Health Department Launches Cutting-Edge Screening Program

BALTIMORE, MD (March 24, 2010) – In recognition of World Tuberculosis Day 2010, Interim Health Commissioner Olivia D. Farrow is pleased to announce that for the second consecutive year, Baltimore has set a new record for the lowest number of tuberculosis (TB) cases in the city's history.

In 2009, Baltimore reported 17 cases of TB, for an incidence rate of 2.7 per 100,000. This represents a significant decrease from the 32 cases reported in 2008, which had been the previous record low. There were 47 cases reported in 2007.

“This is a significant achievement for the City of Baltimore,” said Interim Commissioner Farrow. “Setting a record yet again is a testament to the efforts of our staff in the TB Control Program, who are working diligently to improve public health in our community.”

Although the number of TB cases identified has never been lower in Baltimore and case reports are down nationally, tuberculosis remains a serious disease and an important public health concern. This year, the U.S. theme for World TB Day is “TB Elimination: Together We Can!” Elimination, however, will require enhanced efforts to identify and treat people who are infected with tuberculosis bacteria before they get sick.

To this end, the Health Department's TB Control Program has launched a pilot project using the QuantiFERON-TB Gold test—a simple, new, highly accurate blood test that is able to diagnose TB infection from a single clinic visit. This is a major improvement over the older, standard skin test, which requires at least two visits with a health care worker and produces more false positive results than the newer screening tool.

“This exciting new test will enable the Health Department to better identify people who are at risk of developing TB disease, and will help us focus on getting them the treatment they need to beat this infection,” said Assistant Commissioner Sherry Johnson Ketemepi, who oversees the TB Control Program.

While the number of tuberculosis cases fluctuates from year to year, the steady progress that Baltimore has seen in TB case reports in recent years is encouraging. With the incorporation of

the new screening test, Baltimore City is sending the message that nothing short of elimination is an acceptable goal.

TB is a disease that is spread from person to person through the air when a sick person coughs, sneezes, sings, or speaks. Most people infected with TB never become sick, and for those who do, the disease is curable with antibiotics when identified early. Symptoms of TB can include a persistent, productive cough of several weeks, tiredness, weakness, loss of appetite, fever, night sweats, and/or weight loss. If left untreated, however, the disease is highly infectious, and can be fatal.

For more information about tuberculosis, please visit our Web site at <http://www.baltimorehealth.org/tb.html>.

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