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LEGISLATIVE FISCAL COMMITTEES' JOINT BUDGET HEARING
State Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Executive Budget
Human Services
Tuesday, February 6, 2018
Sheila J. Poole, Acting Commissioner
New York State Office of Children and Family Services

Good morning Chairwoman Young, Chairwoman Weinstein, Senate Children and Families Committee Chairman Avella, Assembly Children and Families Committee Chairwoman Jaffee, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly. I am Sheila Poole, Acting Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and I am happy to have the opportunity to discuss this year's proposed state budget for OCFS.

Although we are in a challenging fiscal environment, I am pleased that the Executive Budget continues to invest in our core programs: child welfare, child care and juvenile justice.

I. Child Welfare Funding

The Executive Budget maintains \$635 million for child welfare services, enabling us to continue to provide a substantial 62 percent state share reimbursement of local costs for child protective and preventive, after care, independent living and adoption services. This funding supports vital community-based programs statewide and ranks New York among the top in the nation for state support of local child welfare services.

II. Foster Care Block Grant

The Executive Budget continues funding for the foster care block grant at \$383.5 million. This funding supports foster care services, including kinship guardianship programs.

And, while some counties in New York State are experiencing an uptick in foster care placements due to the opioid epidemic, the overall number of children in foster care in New York State continues to decline and is at its lowest point in 20 years.

III. Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility

In keeping with his pledge to cover 100% of the costs related to Raise the Age for

counties that are under their tax cap or have fiscal hardships, the Governor has included \$100 million in his Executive Budget to reimburse counties for costs related to Raise the Age implementation. In addition, his proposal includes funding to support capital projects to expand capacity in the juvenile justice system for additional youth that will come into our facilities.

The Executive Budget also provides OCFS with the authority to close Ella McQueen Reception Center in Brooklyn, which is extremely underutilized at great cost to taxpayers. We are committed to avoiding layoffs for the 58 employees there.

IV. Child Care for Low-Income New Yorkers

The Governor's budget helps to ease the cost of child care for working families by restoring the child care subsidy program to \$806 million. New York continues to rank among the highest in the country in using federal dollars for direct subsidy support.

The budget adds an additional \$10 million to last year's \$35 million in Empire State After School Program grants in the State Education Department budget, bringing the total program to \$45 million. OCFS administers the funds. And, with the new round of funding, non-profits will now be eligible, in addition to school districts, to create approximately 6,250 new slots that would be targeted to homeless children and children living in areas of Long Island impacted by gang activity.

The budget also continues \$17 million for the Advantage After School Program. These two investments in after school programs will serve more than 44,000 children.

As you know, the Governor signed the child care task force bill into law. The task force will study and analyze the availability of child care, assess affordability and identify areas that need to be addressed. As we all agree, child care is a critical support for working families and an important component of workforce and economic development. Once the agreed-upon chapter amendment is enacted and membership is appointed, this important work will get underway. OCFS looks forward to being an active member of the task force, as we are keenly aware of how important this issue is to New York State's families.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address you today. I welcome your questions and comments.