



Testimony respectfully submitted to the New York State Human Services Hearing
February 6, 2018

I extend my deepest thanks to Senator Cathy Young and Assembly Member Helene Weinstein. Thank you for letting me speak today. I'm honored to first be given this opportunity in 2009. Sadly, over those last nine years most counties in New York have seen rates of child maltreatment rise.

Everyone is discussing the state's priorities right now, which will be reflected in the state's \$150 billion budget. There will be many pressures on the budget; amongst them priorities like fixing the opioid problem along with other drug and alcohol dependency. Preventing domestic and sexual violence. Reducing homelessness. Managing spiralling health costs. Preventing gang and crew violence.

We can substantially reduce child maltreatment, and through that protect the state's most valuable resource, our children; while addressing the issues listed above.

Child maltreatment has consequences. We know through the CDC's Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study that child maltreatment dramatically increases your risk of dying of one of the seven leading causes of death. More than two thirds of New York's children have ACEs; doubling their chance of becoming alcoholics, and giving them a 40% higher chance of becoming an intravenous drug user. These grown children fill our mental health and addiction clinics. Our prisons. Many require special education. One in ten attempt suicide every year.

Child Protective Services (CPS) play an essential role, but CPS respond to maltreatment, they don't prevent it. The harm is done. The ACE study demonstrates that surviving a single incidence of abuse impacts a child for life. And our collective decisions about exposing children to ACEs impact taxpayers.

The good news is that we have programs that prevent ACEs. The bad news is that they are available to 5% of the people who qualify for them.



One Child Is One Too Many

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Maternal Home Visiting programs break the cycle of intergenerational trauma, poverty and violence, by identifying the families most in need of help and forming long-term, intensive, therapeutic relationships. Participating parents become better parents and more successful adults. The biggest Maternal Home Visiting program in New York is Healthy Families NY. It is effective and cost-effective. And yet it has been flat funded for more than a decade.

Every year over a hundred children in New York die directly from child abuse and neglect. The names and faces change, their stories don't. A four-year-old boy raped and then beaten to death by his mother's drug-addicted boyfriend. But his mother had been sexually abused herself, and she couldn't safely live with her parents. She had no ability to support herself, making her dependent on boyfriends for survival. She had no learned memory of healthy parenting to fall back on. If she had participated in Healthy Families NY, she would have healed from her own scars, become self sufficient and protected her son. But because we fund programs for less than 1 in 10 parents like her, neither she nor her son could reap their benefits.

We claim we cannot afford the maternal home visiting programs that would have helped her and kept her son alive. But somehow we can afford the murder trial, the incarceration of the murderer, and the cost of foster care for her surviving child (\$51-\$54 per day.)

Everyone in this room has heard some kind of financial argument that supports ACE prevention, and the human cost is more glaring. The abused child who is beaten to death, who kills themselves as a teenager, who overdoses as an adult, are all dying of complications from their trauma. We have the knowledge to prevent these tragedies; but do we have the will? Apparently not yet.

We are asking for a \$5 million increase for the general Healthy Families NY budget. We're asking for an additional \$13 million to fund two universal access pilots. Healthy Families NY has never been made available to every willing, eligible family in a community before. Giving these families access to this program will change entire communities, rather than just families. Taxpayers will see a reduction of expensive CPS cases and preterm births which will decrease in the first year. As the same cohort of protected children grow older entire school districts will see children coming in to school ready to learn, with fewer behavioral problems These pilots will demonstrate how New York can protect its children and reduce taxpayer burdens. We will be becoming a state and nation that truly protects children.



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