



Testimony
Offered to the Social Services Committee
of the New York State Senate

by
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Chairman Tedisco, members of the Committee, thank you for your time today. I will be brief.

I am the Executive Director of the Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York. We are a parent-led, private not-for-profit organization formed over forty years specifically as a voice and resource for families who commit themselves to nurturing and parenting many of our state's neediest and most traumatized children. Today, we have offices in New Paltz, Ithaca and Amityville and a network of over 70 parent-led support groups throughout the state. I myself grew up in kinship care, am a former foster parent and the very proud adoptive parent of a now young man who is serving our country in the United States Army and is, on this very day, in a plane on his way to deployment in South Korea.

It is winter, and as you well know, attention in Albany focuses on the budget. I speak to you to voice the concern of parents and young people with the Governor's proposals as they relate to child welfare.

Specifically, we are concerned about the Governor's proposal to cap the state share of child welfare services, including protective, preventive, independent living and adoption administration for New York City. This proposal strikes at the heart of the greatest number of our state's families and children. It is yet another example of our state not meeting its ethical mandate and statutory share of expenses for vulnerable children and families.

This cap will either reduce services that prevent children's entry *and re-entry* in foster care. It will increase, unnecessarily, trauma faced by children and adults alike. This cap is simply not in the best interest of children or families.

If the emotional and mental aspect of unnecessary trauma and disruption is not enough to illicit questions about the logic of the Governor's proposed cuts, consider the financial. The foster care provided in congregate care, group homes and residential facilities, is by comparison, exceedingly more expensive. The phrase "penny wise and pound foolish" comes to mind.

Each time our state proposes cutting its share of the cost of child welfare services, it places an unfair burden on localities, who are already paying more than their fair share because of our state continues to

turn a blind eye to statutorily-required cost-sharing provisions. This places an unreasonable burden on localities – whether it is New York City, home to the lion’s share of our state’s children, or upstate counties such as Herkimer or Broome.

You could say, “Oh well, they’ll just have to suck it up.” To this, I would ask, who is the “they?” I will tell you who it is. The “they” who has to “suck it up” over and over again is children, foster families and relatives who step up to care for children when their parents cannot.

This happens as our state continues to fight to recruit and retain enough foster parents – even in the face of a declining number of children in care. This happens as our state continues to score at the bottom of the heap for the length of time it takes for children in foster care to attain permanency – the security of stable, loving, permanent home.

In light of all of this, I urge this committee and your fellow senators to push back against the Governor’s proposed cuts to child welfare services.

Now, while I know that attention at the moment is focused on the budget, I would like to take a moment to turn our attention to two relevant bills that may come before you and your colleagues this session before I close:

- S5169, A bill relating to issuing non-certified copies of original long form birth certificates to adoptees. Sponsored by Senator Avella. This bill, would, at long last, allow adult adopted persons to have access to their original birth certificate. This, the ability of each individual to understand and know their biology and their roots, is a fundamental human right. It is also one that I, like adopted parents across our state, support. We understand well that our children need this.
- S5790, The Preserving Family Bonds Act. Sponsored by Senator Savino. This bill, while dubbed with a title all of us could seemingly support, is not good for children or families. In short, it attempts to solve the systemic problem of our binary, adversarial child protective and family court systems with a “solution” that works for no one. It will only lead to more acrimony in our system, and, if enacted, will inevitably reduce the number of people willing to adopt children in foster care. The Coalition, always seeking to improve our foster care system, would very much like to be part of a process that creates better solutions for families and children, but this bill is not it.

In sum, I urge serious consideration of the impact to children and families as you contemplate and the budget and the cuts proposed by Governor Cuomo. Our shared goal should always lie with the best interests of children, and with improving the lives of all families – foster families, relative caregivers and birth parents alike.

Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York

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