

Testimony to the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2018-2019 Executive Budget Proposal
Jenn Hyde, Executive Director of Tri-County Services

Good morning Chairpersons and other distinguished legislators

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience as executive director of Catholic Charities Tri-County Services with you today and my thoughts on how this transaction will have a transformative effect on my organization and similar charities across the state of New York. I have been in this role for over four years and previously worked at the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

With my comments today, I hope to shed light on the current realities we face as social service providers. Before I go into detail about various programs and needs, I do want to point out that in my field, within both my own organization, along with our partners and peers are some of the most talented, most committed and caring individuals you'll find anywhere. These are individuals that devote their entire lives to helping others and I hope to share some of their experiences with you today.

I want to start by making clear that our focus is on providing all New Yorkers, specifically in the Capital Region, with the program and support services they need, especially for those in underserved, disadvantaged neighborhoods. Expanding access to health insurance through the Affordable Care Act and other means has made a significant impact by ensuring individuals can access doctors and medical services. However, health insurance on its own does not address the root causes of broader health and wellness disparities—which often are the result of substandard housing or homelessness, lack of employment, poor nutrition or violence in the community. Addressing these critical needs is often left to organizations like Tri-County Services. I'm incredibly proud of the work we do today and believe we can reach even more children and families with additional resources.

Our organization provides an array of services through formal programs, but will work to meet any need of someone that comes to us because we recognize that for many, we are the only place to turn for help.

In 2017, we served 15,536 people in our five outreach programs. These programs, located throughout Albany and Rensselaer counties, see neighbors in need every day who come to us because they are hungry; struggling to meet life's challenges. Every day our clients have to ask themselves questions like:

- "Where will my next meal come from?"
- "Should I pick up that needed medicine or put that money towards the heating bill?"
- "My child needs school supplies. How can I possibly get everything that they need?"

Amidst the challenges our world is facing today, we meet people where they are. Their struggles are very real and hunger is most often a symptom of a larger issue in their life such as, no bus fare to get to work, a past due heating bill, or needing back-to-school clothes for growing children. Our goal is to see that no person goes hungry with a larger hope to strengthen their lives and our communities.

Another of our programs, Camp Scully, is a summer camp program for children ages 5-17. Located on Snyder's Lake in Rensselaer County, we operate both a day camp and an overnight camp for children of all faiths and backgrounds, who without Camp Scully, would have no reliable supervision, summer education or opportunities for personal growth while school is out of session. Every summer, 200 kids get a scholarship to attend the overnight camp for a week, where they get to test their physical and mental toughness on challenge courses in the woods, take swim lessons, learn to kayak and have access to healthy, nutritious meals.

For many kids, this is one of the few opportunities they get to enjoy a safe space and just be a kid. The same is true over at the Sunnyside Child Development Center in Troy. We see a lot of kids from difficult

family situations at the center, but you would never know it. These kids are running around, learning and making new friends. They're doing everything a kid should get to do.

The fact that we get to serve hundreds of kids through these two programs and nearly 16,000 residents in the Capital Region through additional services such as food pantries and soup kitchens, speaks to the drastic needs our communities have.

Beyond the social and economic benefits of improving childhood outcomes, we have a moral duty to make sure we are not leaving anyone behind. I imagine a day where we can double, triple or even multiply the number of camp scholarships we offer by 10. But we can't do that without more funding.

The Fidelis foundation would provide the critical funding we need to expand. Hundreds of organizations like mine would be able to quickly and effectively scale up their operations to serve more people in need, in communities that too often lack the resources and support residents need to thrive.

I hear stories from across the state where if only a local non-profit had more resources, they would be able to meet a lingering need in the community. In Buffalo, that means doing more to connect care coordinators, so people can more effectively use the health services already available to them. In Rochester, there is a tremendous need for more support for first-time moms. Connecting expecting mothers with nurses who specialize in pre-natal support can make a world of difference and help to empower expecting women with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive as a parent.

I can go on and on about the needs we face in our state, but I'm sure you all are aware of where there are disparities and gaps. With the Fidelis foundation focused on increasing access to care, mental health and substance abuse, healthy communities, healthy behaviors, caring for aging populations and promoting healthy childhoods, we can make meaningful progress in addressing disparities on a scale that hasn't been done before.

A charitable foundation providing approximately \$200M in grants every single year in perpetuity would be a gamechanger for generations of New Yorkers. You would be shocked if I told you what we can do with a donation as small as \$100. Imagine what organizations like mine could do with \$100,000 or \$200,000 or \$1M dollars. As elected officials representing New Yorkers of all stripes and backgrounds, I can say to you wholeheartedly, this money will have an invaluable impact on the lives of tens of thousands of our neighbors, friends and loved ones.

I truly appreciate the opportunity to share this testimony with you all. Thank you.