

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL COMMITTEES' JOINT BUDGET HEARING
State Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Executive Budget
Human Services
Thursday, January 24, 2019
Sheila J. Poole, Acting Commissioner
New York State Office of Children and Family Services

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

This year's Executive Budget continues funding for OCFS's core programs – child welfare, child care and juvenile justice – while making strategic investments in new programs to better serve New York's children and families.

The Executive Budget continues funding for the foster care block grant at \$383.5 million. The statewide number of children in foster care continues to decline and is at a record low of approximately 16,000 youth. The proposed budget maintains NYS's historic investment in uncapped child welfare prevention services which play a significant role in contributing to NY's declining number of children in foster care, despite the devastating opioid crisis facing our state and nation.

As many of you know, last year the federal government enacted the Family First Prevention Services Act. This new law will require local social districts and foster care programs to adopt and implement new policies encouraging more placements with relatives and foster parents and less reliance on the use of institutional care. There are tremendous opportunities, along with a number of challenges ahead, in order for New York to comply with the law. An important strategy to assist OCFS and our partners in preparing for these changes is the proposed creation of a Family First Transition Fund – a public private partnership that will create a flexible stream of funds for local social services districts and foster care agencies in order to help with identifying and better supporting kinship and foster families. The Governor's proposed budget calls for a \$3 million investment in developing innovative solutions to recruit and support foster and kinship families.

The Executive Budget includes an historic \$832 million in funding to access quality child care – the largest investment to date. The proposed budget includes funding to implement the new market rates and take additional steps to comply with the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014. We need the Legislature's support in passing an Article VII bill to provide OCFS with the authority to enact required background check and inspection requirements. Failure to have this bill enacted will result in a fiscal penalty to the state's federal child care funding.

As co-chair of the Governor's Child Care Availability Task Force, I am pleased to report that work is underway in examining new ideas for expanding access to affordable child care in our

state. I am confident that the group of providers, advocates, and child care experts serving on the task force will bring forth new and bold ideas. I would like to acknowledge Assemblywoman Jaffee for her leadership and participation as a member of the Task Force.

In that spirit, the Executive Budget proposal calls for the Regional Economic Development Councils to develop region-specific strategies to increase access to reliable and affordable child care.

The Executive Budget also proposes creating a tax credit for businesses that provide child and dependent care facilities to their employees.

To help child care workers improve their skills and advance their careers, the Governor's budget proposes offering free tuition in the form of a child care worker scholarship at SUNY and CUNY schools for individuals who work in state-licensed child care facilities at least 20 hours a week.

To help eliminate child care as a barrier to advancing education and competitive employment, the Governor has proposed a pilot program on two-year SUNY and CUNY campuses for up to 400 parents to receive on-campus child care and other supports for three years. The program seeks to transition parents to a four-year school and promote college graduation.

The Governor's proposal increases funding for after school programs by \$20 million. This includes \$10 million each for the Advantage Afterschool Program and the Empire State After School program. This is on top of the \$45 million invested in the Empire State After School Program last year. The additional funding for the Advantage After School program will allow for not-for-profits to increase wages for after school program staff. As we all know, after school programs give parents peace of mind while providing a safe and nurturing environment for children to spend time after school.

The Governor's budget proposal abolishes the requirement that domestic violence survivors seeking shelter apply for public assistance or pay a fee to receive these services. I am also pleased to report that a group of Executive state agencies has been working hard with stakeholders and advocates on ways to streamline and enhance the state's delivery of domestic violence services.

The enacted Raise the Age legislation eliminated state funding for persons in need of supervision (PINS) in detention and PINS placement as of January 1, 2020. The Executive budget proposes to ban these practices to improve outcomes for children and eliminate an unfunded mandate for counties. No child should be placed in detention for non-criminal activity. It is my hope that this is the year that New York will end this practice.

As you know, on October 1 of 2018, New York State achieved the momentous accomplishment of removing all 16- and 17-year-olds from Rikers Island and implemented Raise the Age for 16-year-olds. The Executive Budget proposal builds upon the successful implementation of the first phase of the landmark Raise the Age initiative. The Executive Budget proposes \$200 million in funding to support the implementation of Raise the Age for 17-year-olds as well as a re-appropriation of last year's funding. This funding supports the Governor's pledge to cover 100

percent of Raise the Age-related costs for counties that are under the tax cap or those with fiscal hardship.

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