

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL COMMITTEES' JOINT BUDGET HEARING
State Fiscal Year 2020-21 Executive Budget
Human Services
Thursday, January 30, 2020
Sheila J. Poole, Commissioner
New York State Office of Children and Family Services

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

This year's Executive Budget maintains OCFS funding just above last year's levels to support our core child welfare, child care and juvenile justice programs, while investing in new initiatives to better serve New York's children and families.

As you know, on October 1, 2019, New York reached an historic milestone when Raise the Age took full effect. In keeping with Governor Cuomo's pledge to fully fund Raise the Age for eligible counties, the Executive Budget adds \$50 million to support Raise the Age implementation, for a total of \$250 million in the coming fiscal year.

The Executive Budget expands the Empire State Child Tax Credit to provide \$157 million in relief to 400,000 families who have children under the age of four and who earn up to \$50,000 a year.

Having adequate access to child care remains a national policy and fiscal issue as well as a state one. The Governor's Child Care Availability Task Force is continuing its important work and will issue its final report in December.

In the meantime, the proposed Executive Budget maintains its commitment of nearly \$832 million for child care subsidies – the highest level of investment in state history serving more than 100,000 low-income families with 170,000 children.

We are also pleased to share that New York State has awarded an additional \$20 million in federal funding to expand subsidized child care statewide by an additional 2,500 child care slots.

In addition, OCFS anticipates additional funding this year through the federal Child Care Development Fund. And, the New York State Council on Children and Families, which OCFS hosts, has also been awarded federal funds in the amount of \$40 million through the Preschool Development Birth Through Five Grant which will strengthen our early childhood care and education system.

Governor Cuomo mandated the Regional Economic Development Councils to consider child care in their proposals and they answered! During round 9, nearly \$8.8 million was awarded to 16 child care projects, and an additional \$7.3 million was awarded to four projects that have a child care component. Every region has responded with proposals specific to their area and we are looking forward to seeing these public-private ideas come to fruition.

Still, we recognize that there is more work to be done to make quality, affordable child care accessible to all families who need it and we will continue our work toward that end.

The Governor's proposal again expands access to quality after school programming by adding \$10 million for a fourth round of Empire After School Program grants. This will create 6,250 new after school slots for students in high need districts and will bring our total expenditures on after school programs to \$134 million to serve 80,000 students. When combined with funding for pre-kindergarten programs and child-focused tax credits, the state's overall support for families with young children has increased by more than \$500 million since 2011.

As co-chair of the Governor's Domestic Violence Task Force, I am pleased to report that the Executive Budget includes ambitious proposals to address the growing problem of domestic violence. As urged by the Task Force, the budget adds \$5 million for a new funding pilot program to explore innovative models and provide greater flexibility in meeting the needs of families affected by domestic violence.

The number of children entering foster care continues its downward trajectory. However, we know that far too many children from minority families still end up involved with the child welfare system as a result of implicit bias, despite the best intentions of our dedicated child welfare professionals. This year we will take the bold step of requiring every county in the state to follow a blind removal process when considering whether to remove a child from their home. It is time to adopt blind removals statewide and take a significant step toward ensuring social justice for all children and families.

Last year, with your support, New York began implementing the federal Family First Prevention Services Act with the Family First Transition Fund to help local social services districts support, recruit and retain foster families, including kinship caregivers. The Executive Budget continues \$3 million in funding for the state-supported transition fund. It also provides authorization to spend up to \$75 million new, one-time federal funds we received through our aggressive lobbying efforts in Washington. This new funding includes up to \$50 million for the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) in New York City.

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