



**Citizens' Committee  
for Children** of NEW YORK



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Presented to the New York State FY 2021 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing

## **Human Services**

January 30, 2020

Good afternoon. My name is Daryl Hornick-Becker and I am a Policy and Advocacy Associate at the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. CCC is a 75-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, nor represent a sector or workforce. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions.

I would like to thank Chair Weinstein, Chair Krueger and all the members of the Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees for holding today's hearing on the Human Services related proposals in the Governor's Executive Budget for the State Fiscal Year 2021.

CCC recognizes the need to be fiscally prudent given the current budget deficit. That said, we are very disappointed that the State Budget is being balanced by cutting and curtailing services for the most vulnerable children and families. CCC is deeply concerned that the Executive Budget proposes cuts to child welfare services and afterschool programming, does not address New York's child care crisis, lacks supports for families experiencing homelessness, continues the unethical practice of youth solitary confinement, and fails to protect access to children's behavioral health care.

We are also worried about reductions that eliminate or decrease funding for critical services the most vulnerable New Yorkers depend on – many of whom reside in New York City. The executive budget proposes caps on Medicaid spending and cuts to TANF-funded initiatives with new limits to reimbursement that would result in significant cost shifts to New York City. We urge the Legislature to negotiate a budget with the Governor that is balanced in a manner that improves the wellbeing of children, youth and families.

Turning specifically to the Human Services budget:

### **Child Care**

The executive budget proposes no new investments or solutions for the current child care crisis that is facing New York. High quality child care is a prohibitively expensive necessity for every middle- to low-income family across the state, and helpful child care subsidies currently serve fewer than 20% of the low-income families that are eligible to receive them. Additionally, early childhood educators in many regions of the State are paid so little that many are living on or near poverty, threatening the stability of the entire system. Recognizing this problem the Governor commissioned a child care availability task force over two years ago, and yet the executive budget



includes none of their recommendations and fails to add any new funding to address the ongoing crisis.

We urge the Assembly and Senate to amend the proposed budget to address the child care crisis; first, by investing at least \$40 million to create a fund to increase workforce compensation and improve child care quality; and second, by adding another \$60 million for child care subsidies to increase eligibility levels, decrease families' copayments, and expand access.

CCC was also deeply disappointed to see the Executive Budget include only a small investment for statewide universal pre-kindergarten. A \$15 million increase in funding for statewide universal pre-k would impact an estimated 2,000 children according to the Governor's budget, but there are over 77,000 four-year olds without access to full-day pre-k outside of New York City. We urge the Legislature to invest \$150 million in universal pre-k across the state to add seats for at least 15,000 preschoolers, and to fund regional assistance centers to maintain quality and partner school districts with community-based programs.

### **Afterschool**

We applaud the Governor for recognizing the importance of afterschool programming by adding \$10 million in a fourth round of Empire State After School grants in the Executive Budget, estimated to provide an additional 6,250 students with afterschool programs. But we were disappointed to see in the same budget a proposed \$5 million reduction in the Advantage Afterschool Program; a cut that would force 2,500 children to lose their afterschool programming next year.

We urge the Legislature to restore that funding, and to add an additional \$5 million to bring overall funding for Advantage to \$33 million. This would increase per-pupil rates from \$2,000 to \$2,320 to maintain services and quality programming, and to accommodate rising operational costs.

### **Child Welfare**

CCC is deeply concerned with the Executive Budget's proposed \$25 million reduction in child welfare funds to the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and its potential impact on New York City's child welfare agency, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). The State also continues to reduce state reimbursements of preventive services to 62% despite statute requiring a 65% state match. We urge the Legislature to restore these funds, invest in preventive services, and help decrease the number of children placed in foster care.

CCC is also concerned that the State continues to fund the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) within the Foster Care Block Grant. Because of this funding structure, KinGAP is under-utilized across the state; in 2017, only 481 children statewide left foster care for a KinGAP arrangement and nearly 80% of those children were in New York City. There is a clear opportunity to expand the use of KinGAP across the state by funding it outside of the Foster Care Block Grant, similar to how adoption subsidies are funded. By improving its funding mechanism, we can ensure that more children can find a stable, well-supported, permanent home with kin.



### **Juvenile Justice**

With the passing of Raise the Age legislation in 2017, the automatic prosecution and confinement of 16- and 17-year-olds adults has ended. CCC was excited to see the new section of Correction Law requiring all Adolescent Offenders (AOs) to be transferred from Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to OCFS facilities by October 1st, 2020. We were also pleased to see legislation that would allow AOs to be held in OCFS facilities until they reached age 21.

We strongly support the Governor's commitment to increase funding for the implementation of Raise the Age, but to truly build on the progress made thus far, CCC urges the Legislature to consider ending all forms of solitary confinement in AO facilities. Experts in mental health and corrections have rejected solitary as a response to adolescent behavior, but current practice permits children to be held in isolation for 18 to 22 hours a day. Teenagers are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of isolation, including increased risk for suicide. We demand that DOCCS issues new rules that immediately end this practice in facilities for sentenced youth.

CCC also asks that the Legislature strengthen and expand protections for court-involved youth up to age 25. Based on research in neuroscience and psychology, we know that brain development continues into the mid-20s. New York's Youthful Offender law provides the opportunity for youth under the age of 19 to have a criminal conviction set aside and/or a reduced sentence. However, at age 19 this critical protection is no longer available and young people face mandatory prison sentences and lifelong criminal records that create barriers to education, jobs, and housing. New York should strengthen existing protections under the Youthful Offender law and create a new "Young Adult" status for youth up to age 25.

Additionally, CCC calls on the State to end the practice of prosecuting children under 12. Under current law, children as young as 7 may be arrested and prosecuted as juvenile delinquents in family court, and may be subject to police questioning, pre-trial detention with older youth, probation, and mandatory confinement. By raising the lower age of delinquency jurisdiction from 7 to 12 we can better serve elementary-age children who come to the attention of law enforcement through the existing system of community-based services, including those available through our local departments of social services and behavioral health care.

### **Homelessness**

CCC was pleased to see the Executive Budget's continued investment in supportive housing, with \$950 million included this year as part of the State's five-year \$20 billion comprehensive plan to invest in affordable housing. However, it is unclear how this historic investment will be prioritized to directly impact families experiencing homelessness, who represent the majority of residents in the shelter system. In New York City alone families make up 70% of the residents in city shelters.

We urge the Legislature to combat the family homelessness epidemic by addressing one of its lead drivers: domestic violence. This year's budget should include flexible funding for a Rapid Rehousing for Domestic Violence Survivors pilot program. Rapid Rehousing is a HUD-approved model that connects survivors of domestic violence who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to safe, affordable permanent housing by providing a targeted package of services, including financial



assistance, case management, and post-placement supports. Similar pilots have been implemented in other states and have been both successful and cost-effective, and it is a model that was recommended by the Governor's own domestic violence task force.

To further prevent homelessness, we also urge the Legislature to amend the Executive Budget to include funding for Home Stability Supports. HSS is a statewide rental supplement for public assistance-eligible families and individuals facing eviction, currently homeless, or at risk of homelessness, that would replace existing state and local rent subsidies. HSS is a far more effective rental-assistance program that would result in savings to taxpayers through reduced shelter costs, in addition to savings from the extensive social costs of homelessness.

### **Economic Security**

CCC welcomes efforts to provide tax relief to New York's families, and we applaud the Governor's two proposed tax initiatives in the Executive Budget. First, authorizing the Department of Taxation and Finance to automatically pay eligible families the Earned Income Tax Credit without requiring them to file an amended return. And second, allowing DTF to provide the standard deduction instead of the itemized deduction when the standard deduction is greater. Our hope is that these simple administrative actions will maximize and streamline tax deductions and help keep children and families from economic insecurity.

However, tax reductions can only go so far in providing both income supports to families and economic access to crucial services. In the Executive Budget the Governor also proposed an expansion of the Child Care Tax Credit to include children under the age of four and families with an income of up to \$50,000. While CCC welcomes the expansion, it would be a mistake to think that a tax credit of a maximum of \$330 per year could have any meaningful impact on families facing child care costs annually in the thousands or tens of thousands of dollars. Family-oriented tax policies must be advanced along with added funding for child care subsidies, investments in the early education workforce, and expanded universal pre-k, in order to truly improve access and lower the cost of child care.

The human services sector is a critical component of the fabric of New York. Children and families throughout the state rely on these services, yet many programs are struggling due to years of under-investment. CCC urges the Legislature to work with the Governor to ensure the sector remains strong in these uncertain times and has the resources needed to provide high-quality services. Budget reductions to core Human Services and costs shifts to localities ultimately impede the sector's ability to respond to the needs of vulnerable New Yorkers. The current budget deficit must not be balanced on the backs of New York's children and families.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.