

New York Public Welfare Association

NYPWA Statement on the Executive Budget for SFY 2021-22 for the

Joint Legislative Budget Committee on Human Services

Sheila Harrigan, Executive Director

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The New York Public Welfare Association (NYPWA) represents all fifty-eight local departments of social services statewide. Our members are dedicated to improving the quality and effectiveness of social welfare policy so that it is accountable to taxpayers and protective of vulnerable people.

Make it a Top Priority to Help the Most Vulnerable New Yorkers

The NYPWA and its members recognize that every level of government has lost revenues in the past year and that this requires spending reductions. The hard question is how much of this burden is to be borne by vulnerable children, adults, and families that need our help—and how high a priority are they when more funding becomes available? The Executive Budget proposal's broad funding cuts exacerbate the challenges of local departments of social services and their contract agencies in serving people that need help.

In anticipation of any new federal revenue that is allocated to New York State in the coming months, we are seeking a commitment from the Governor, Assembly, and Senate to make it a top priority to help the most vulnerable New Yorkers and to fund the administration of these programs on a local level.

When people are hungry, homeless, or vulnerable and need help, they come to local social services offices or staff go to them. When there is a crisis, local districts are on the frontlines assisting the public. Child protective and adult protective caseworkers are first responders in emergencies.

We recognize the leadership of both OCFS and OTDA in providing local districts with the added flexibility needed to serve the public during the past year and for looking ahead at ways to reduce administrative burdens.

We appreciate OTDA's success in accessing federal funding streams for housing and in obtaining waivers to promote public health and safety during the pandemic.

We recommend that the waivers for face-to-face eligibility interviews be extended throughout the pandemic with consideration to making them permanent.

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Oppose 5% Across the Board Human Services Cuts

OTDA's achievements contrast with the proposed five percent cuts that will require cuts to local social services operations as well as to contract agencies that provide Code Blue housing, other shelters, and case management services. As SNAP and Safety Net Assistance caseloads rise, local districts are under further strain as the state continues to provide no administrative dollars for these programs.

Local districts process online applications and meet with the public in-person to approve SNAP, Temporary Assistance, Medicaid, HEAP, childcare, and other benefits. On a daily basis, these offices assist vulnerable New Yorkers including people that have suffered from racism, discrimination, illness, disabilities, addiction, violence, and profound poverty. Early budget actions in 2020 led to hiring freezes and staff reductions that are still in place. The Executive Budget's five percent cuts further dismantle state support for the most vulnerable. Such funding losses would lead directly to cuts to the agencies that operate these important programs.

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In addition, counties rely on the state network to operate the technology essential in meeting the needs of the public including options, such as kiosks, that have been created for them. The possibility of the state pulling back on this support in the coming year creates a precarious situation. We urge the state to continue its technology commitments to counties in order to serve the public.

Protect Vital Children's Services

Each cut to child welfare contradicts the state's goals to prevent abuse and neglect, protect children from maltreatment, and achieve permanency. These cuts will also impede our ability to comply with Family First legislation. Here is a list of proposed cuts which will impact services:

- **Child Welfare Services:** cut by \$30.5 million
- **Foster Care Block Grant:** cut by \$11.2 million
- **Adoption Subsidy:** cut by \$9.4 million
- **Adult Protective/Domestic Violence:** cut by \$2.2 million
- **STSJP/COPS:** a \$4.1 million cut with the consolidation of the Supervision & Treatment Services for Juveniles Program (STSJP) and the Community Optional Prevention Services (COPS) programs
- **Detention Services:** cut by \$3.8 million
- **Indian Tribe Foster Care, Adult and CPS, Preventive, and Adoption Services:** cut by \$235,000
- **Elimination of Legislative Adds:** cuts amounting to \$29.4 million for various programs defined as "Legislative Adds" (i.e., Safe Harbor, Child Advocacy Centers, Youth Development, Runaway & Homeless Youth, Kinship Programs, etc.)

Keep Family Assessment Responses Optional (OPPOSE Mandate under ELFA Part M)

The NYPWA strongly supports continuation of the state's long-standing policy that gives districts the **option** on whether to implement the Family Assessment Response (FAR). In the midst of across-the-board cuts, New York State does not have the resources to add a new statewide mandate—even one with a delayed start date. State funds were allocated to the original FAR counties in recognition that there are added costs to run this program. About half of the counties currently implement FAR. Those who chose not to implement FAR (or who tried it and ended it) have made thoughtful decisions about why it is not the best option for their communities.

Family engagement is supported by a variety of approaches and is not unique to differential response. If FAR was the best option everywhere in the state, everyone would already be doing it. The fact that it is not everywhere is because it is not a one-size-fits-all answer. Counties that ended FAR did not find that this negatively affected outcomes for children served through other child preventive and protective programs. All the local commissioners understand the benefit of keeping FAR optional.

Children's Services Funding is Critical to Implement Family First (ELFA Part L)

The NYPWA supports the intent of the federal law to promote Family First principles and family-based care. However, the Executive Budget proposal reduces preventive services, foster care and adoption funding, which provides us with the tools to take the steps to comply with this law.

Support Implicit Bias Training

Our Association provided a series of training events on the topics of Recognizing Implicit Bias, Race Equity Strategies, and Anti-Racism, during the past year. We acknowledge the importance of this ongoing work and support the state including this subject area in future training curriculums.

In closing, we wish to thank the NYS Assembly Ways and Means and NYS Senate Finance Committees for your leadership in bringing attention to the challenging fiscal and policy issues affecting social services.

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