



Leadership, voice and vision for child welfare in New York State

**Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies**  
**Testimony Presented by**  
**Kathleen Brady-Stepien, President and CEO**  
**Before the**  
**Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees**  
**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Higher Education**  
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My name is Kathleen Brady-Stepien. I am the President and CEO of the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA). Our member agencies include over 100 not-for-profit organizations providing foster care, adoption, family preservation, juvenile justice, and special education services in New York State. I appreciate the opportunity today to address the Legislature regarding the need for investments in our child welfare workforce.

COFCCA members' child welfare workforce is comprised of professionally trained and deeply committed individuals, often largely comprised of women of color. As essential workers throughout the pandemic, these workers continued to show up every day and supported children and youth in foster care, foster parents, caregivers, and families.

Over the last several years the workforce crisis already experienced by the sector has been exacerbated by the pandemic, its accompanying labor market challenges, and state and federal investments for workers in other sectors but not in child welfare. Pandemic related state and federal funding which has been provided for workers in sectors overseen by other state agencies (Office of Mental Health and the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities), was not provided for the Office of Children and Family Services' (OCFS) child welfare programs.

Quality in our workforce is directly tied to the quality of care and overall experience of children and families in the child welfare system. Child welfare caseworkers are leaving the field altogether for other better paying sectors such as education and mental health, or they are moving to the private sector. Staffing shortages, vacancies, and turnover are linked to negative outcomes in for children and youth across continuum of care in the system, from prevention services to foster care. An investment in the this workforce is also an investment in families, and results in fewer out of home placements of children, and reduced lengths of stay for children in foster care.

Our child welfare staff tell us that in addition to salary increases, they need more support in achieving their higher education goals. We consistently hear from our child welfare workers that although they find the work very challenging, they enjoy what they do and want to continue to grow with our agencies. Many staff in our programs desire to become supervisors or even aspire to be in a senior leadership position such as a program director or a CEO someday; however, they need advanced education degrees to pursue those positions. We also often hear that they begin to look for other jobs when they cannot afford to pay their student loan monthly repayments. We seek a long-term option for supporting the child welfare workforce in their educational goals so we can begin to build a true career pathway for our state's child welfare professionals.

**COFCCA supports significantly expanding the impact of the NYS Child Welfare Worker Incentive Scholarship Program and the NYS Child Welfare Worker Loan Forgiveness Incentive Programs by increasing the funding for these programs to \$1 million each.** Expansion of these programs from the current funding levels of \$50,000 (which supports up to five full awards per year) could provide a meaningful incentive to many more current and prospective employees across the state to work in the critical field of child welfare, and support the education and training needed to provide quality care.

COFCCA has recently designed and offered leadership development opportunities to promote diversified leadership in child welfare agencies' staff. We believe that increased state investment into our child welfare workforce will greatly assist in our staff recruitment and retention, especially supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at our agencies, and will also create and diversify the next generation of child welfare leaders in the field. However, we need the state to invest in the child welfare workforce to ensure access to and enhance interventions that support families' needs, strengthen neighborhoods and communities, to prevent entry into or escalation within the child welfare system.

Thank you. I am more than happy to answer any questions you may have. My contact information is below.

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