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

Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies

Written Testimony of: Michelle Newman, Associate Executive Director, Upstate, COFCCA
Submitted to: Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on:
Human Services
Wednesday, February 12, 2025

The Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) is the principal representative for nearly all the not-for-profit organizations providing foster care, adoption, family preservation, and juvenile justice services in New York State. COFCCA is comprised of over 100 member organizations, ranging in size from small community-based programs to the nation's largest multi-services agencies — all of which share the mission of serving children and families. COFCCA works with its members and government to ensure quality services for children and their families.

As we engage in a dialogue about the investments needed in our state budget this year, I urge careful consideration of the needs of the thousands of children and families our programs serve through the child welfare system.

<u>COFCCA Budget Request Summary</u>

The Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) Supports:

- Expanding and Improving the Targeted Inflationary Increase for the Human Services Sector (HMH, Part FF):
    - Increase the Governor's proposed 2.1% investment to 7.8%;
    - Equitably invest across the human services workforce by including prevention and health home care management programs as proposed in S.1580 (Persaud)/A.2590 (Hevesi);
    - Ensure annual investments are fully realized by Voluntary Foster Care Agencies as proposed in A.718 (Hevesi); and
    - Establishing a Human Services Employee Wage Board as proposed in S.3953 (Ramos) to review to investigate pay disparities and develop recommendations for equitable wages in the human services sector;
- Enhancing Career Pathways in Child Welfare through:
    - The Governor's Executive Budget proposal to provide $4 million for a loan forgiveness program for Mental Health Clinicians Serving Children (ATL- OMH); and
    - Increasing funding for the Child Welfare Worker Incentive Scholarship Program and the NYS Child Welfare Worker Loan Forgiveness Incentive Programs (ATL-HESC); and
- Expanding Tax Credits for families to help eliminate child poverty;

- Establishing a Foster Care Liability Insurance Risk Pool to ensure agencies can meet their contractually mandated obligations and continue to offer foster care services;
- Creating a mechanism to address the costs of Child Victims Act awards that are granted to individuals previously in the care of a Voluntary Foster Care Agency. Without a state investment, individuals may never receive their due compensation from voluntary foster care agencies and thousands more children will be negatively impacted due to a loss of essential services;
- Maximizing federal Title IV-E funding under the Family First Prevention Services Act and reinvesting savings back into community services, including:
    - Primary prevention as proposed in the Child and Family Well Being Fund;
    - Increasing prevention funding to support families safely remaining together: COFCCA urges the state to restore state reimbursement to counties for prevention investment as proposed in A.487 (Hevesi); and
    - Support for the Prevention Workforce.
- Investing $195m to implement rate enhancements and reforms across the children's continuum of care;
- Creating the Youth Justice Innovation Fund as proposed in A.767 (Solages)/S.643 (Cleare);
- Ensuring children and youth in foster care have access to dental care by:
    - Including Article 29-I facilities in provisions expanding the Scope of Practice of Dental Hygienists (HMH, Part X); and
    - Authorizing Voluntary Foster Care Agencies to use to community dentists and pay them at community rates.
- Expanding the Child Welfare Housing Subsidy to increase support for foster youth leaving care by increasing the upper age limit from 21 to 24 as proposed in A.735 (Hevesi); and
- Increasing funding for the Foster Youth College Success Initiative to $10 million (ATL-SED).

COFCCA Budget Request Detail

We commend Governor Hochul's strong commitment to increasing affordability and opportunity for New Yorkers in her Executive Budget proposal. We applaud the Governor's focus on concrete economic supports, from increasing the child tax credit, to housing and affordable child care that provide upstream investments to enable communities to thrive. We suggest the following additional state actions and investments to ensure access to and enhance interventions that support families' needs, strengthen neighborhoods and communities, and prevent entry into or escalation within the child welfare system.

Expanding and Improving the Targeted Inflationary Increase for the Human Services Sector

We appreciate that Governor Hochul and the legislature have recognized the need for investments in the nonprofit human services sector in recent years through the provision of the Human Services Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs). We recognize the Governor's proposal for a 2.1% investment in the Human Services sector again this year through what is now being called a Targeted Inflationary Increase, but note that the increase is inadequate given significant inflationary costs and workforce need—we strongly support increasing the investment to a full 7.8% in the final budget.

In addition to the magnitude of services that it provides, the Child Welfare sector is also a large employer in the state. According to data collected by COFCCA, at least 55,000 people are employed by their member agencies. Ensuring the viability of the sector is vitally important for the economy of the state.

Our member organizations report experiencing significant continuing increased health insurance costs (15%-20% increase from last year), food (upwards of 10% increases), liability insurance, utilities, and maintenance. Additionally, agencies are struggling with costs associated with staff recruitment efforts given high vacancy rates and unabated turnover rates in the field, and the need to raise salaries for the current workforce to provide parity in investment with other state licensed programs, to align salaries being provided for workers in other settings with similar credentials and experience, stabilize turnover, and to promote future career pathways.

The Child Welfare workforce is comprised of professionally trained and deeply committed individuals, often largely comprised of women of color. These staff support children, youth, and their families in prevention services designed to prevent entry into foster care, as well as children and youth in foster care across New York State. However, COFCCA's 2022 Child Welfare Workforce Report found that staff salaries are not sufficient compared to those for similar jobs in other sectors, particularly within government. When taken together, caseworkers across Child Welfare programs make 37% less than their public employee counterparts[1]. Additionally, many residential direct care workers only make about $5,000 annually above minimum wage in NYC[2], Westchester, and Long Island, and only slightly more in the rest of the state, and many report needing to hold two jobs to support their families.

As a result, workers are turning elsewhere for higher pay and less stressful jobs. The average turnover rate in 2022 was staggering—about 57% among residential child care workers and close to 50% among family foster care caseworkers.[3]

Quality in the workforce supporting children and youth in child welfare is directly tied to the quality of care and overall experience children and families have. Young people in foster care come to develop relationships and rely upon their direct care staff and their caseworkers. High worker turnover negatively impacts children and youth in foster care, and it impacts outcomes.

- **COFCCA urges the legislature to fund the Targeted Inflationary Increase for the Human Services Sector at 7.8%** (HMH, Part FF).

We urge the state to ensure that Human Services investments are fully realized with equity for all programs supporting children and youth in New York State.

For the past several years, the Human Services COLA has been subtracted out of the rate calculation for foster care programs in their state-set rates, the Maximum State Aid Rates (MSAR) before adding the new COLA (for instance, the 4% COLA of two years ago subtracted out, before the application of the 2.84% COLA from last year). This represents a loss of opportunity to build up rates that have already not kept up pace with inflation.

- **COFCCA strongly supports legislation--A.718 (Hevesi)—to ensure that the foster care rates continue this growth year over year as we understand that is the intent of the Human Services investments—to add, not**

[1] When compared to an equivalent state position (PEF Grade 18). https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/state-agencies/payroll/pdf/PEF-salary-schedule-April1-2022.pdf

[2] https://www.ny.gov/new-york-states-minimum-wage/new-york-states-minimum-wage

[3] https://cofcca.wildapricot.org/resources/COFCCA_Final%20General%20Report%20Jan2025.pdf, Table 6: Average Statewide Annual Turnover Rate, 2011-2022, p. 33.

to subtract, from providers' continued ability to meet inflationary cost pressures impacting rising heat, energy, fuel, and food costs, and to continue to grow staff members' rates of pay.

We must also address the human services workforce that has previously been left out of prior Human Services Cost of Living Adjustments. As the State continues to prioritize community based preventive services, we must include the workforce that supports children and families in their communities. The turnover rate among caseworkers in prevention programs in 2022 was almost 43%, double the rate in 2011.

- **COFCCA strongly supports including programs that have previously been left out of human services Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA), including community-based prevention services programs and Health Homes Care Management Programs serving children, in investments in the Human Services sector, as is proposed in S.1580 (Persaud) /A.2590 (Hevesi).**

A stable and well-trained workforce is crucial for ensuring quality services, positive outcomes for our children and families, and reduced lengths of stay in foster care. Current salaries are not competitive for recruitment and retention of staff. We cannot continue to under-support the professionals who are doing this challenging work.

- **COFCCA supports the establishment of a Human Services Employee Wage Board as proposed in S.3953 (Ramos), to review to investigate the pay disparities and develop recommendations for equitable wages in the human services sector.**

Enhancing Career Pathways in Child Welfare

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.

- **COFFCA requests a significant expansion of the impact of the NYS Child Welfare Worker Incentive Scholarship Program to $1 million** (ATL- HESC). We thank the legislature for including an additional $100,000 in the 2025 enacted budget for this program last year. We note that the Governor's FY 2026 Executive budget proposal eliminated this critical funding—we urge the restoration and expansion of the investment this year.

We also often hear that staff begin to look for other jobs when they cannot afford to pay their student loan monthly repayments (given the growing student debt crisis in our country, staff have student loan payments ranging from several hundred dollars per month to payments even in excess of $1000 per month). While we appreciate efforts of the past few years at the federal level to address this issue, we seek a long- term option for supporting New York State's child welfare workforce in their educational goals so we can begin to build a true career pathway for our state's child welfare professionals.

- **Expand the NYS Child Welfare Worker Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program by increasing funding to $1 million** (ATL- HESC).
- **COFCCA strongly supports the Executive Budget proposal to continue the $4 million Loan Forgiveness Program for Mental Health Clinicians Serving Children** (ATL- OMH). This program would specifically support licensed mental health clinicians serving children and families in Office of Mental Health and Office of Children and Family Services licensed settings.

These programs would provide an incentive to current and prospective employees to work in the critical field of child welfare, and support the education and training needed to provide quality care.

Eliminating Child Poverty

Families often come into contact with the child welfare system because they are experiencing poverty.[4] Especially given that families of color disproportionately experience poverty in the United States, it is essential to examine the connections between poverty reduction strategies and child welfare interventions to reduce racial disparities within the child welfare system.[5]

We know that thoughtful tax policy is one way to significantly reduce child poverty.[6] We appreciate the significant progress that New York has already undertaken through the expansion of the Empire State Child Credit (ESCC) to families with children under age 4 in 2023, and a one-time $350 million investment in the ESCC in 2024. We also appreciate and support the Governor's Executive Budget proposal this year to raise the credit maximum of $330 per child to a maximum of $1000 for children under 4 and $500 for children ages 4 through 16.

With New York's child poverty rate persistently higher than the national average[7], it is essential for New York to seize the opportunity to prioritize policies proven to reduce child poverty.

- **COFCCA supports creating the New York State Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) as proposed in the Children and Families Reinvestment Act and expanding the Child Tax Credit as proposed in the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council 2024 recommendations.**

Stabilizing the Liability Insurance Market for Foster Care Providers

Nonprofit child welfare organizations must be able to access, obtain, and pay for liability insurance in order to provide foster care services. Foster care agencies are required per their contracts to carry certain levels of commercial general liability insurance, professional liability insurance, and, depending on the county requirements—potentially excess umbrella liability coverage. Due to social inflation and increasing pressures in the insurance market specifically related to foster care, agencies in NYS and nationwide are experiencing significant challenges in accessing coverage. If successful in accessing coverage, they are typically experiencing significant cost increases. Agencies do not have the resources to pay for these increased costs, and the programs' funding methodology (the Maximum State Aid Rate or MSAR, a state-set administrative rate) does not allow for capturing these significant increases from year to year.

Some of the contributing factors to this challenge in securing liability insurance are "social inflation," referring to a trend of higher jury awards and higher claims payouts due to high-profile sexual abuse cases covered in the media, and the opening of statute of limitations in various states across the country (similar to New York's Child Victims Act). "Social inflation" is causing insurance companies in many instances to assess and drop their risk—and it is happening across the country, not just in NYS. Other contributing factors include insurers' concerns about nonprofit child welfare agencies' unabated staff turnover, vulnerability to cyber-attacks, and a newer trend in the market called

---

[4] https://firstfocus.org/blog/poverty-and-child-neglect-what-we-know-and-what-we-need-to-do
[5] https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/poverty-rate-by-raceethnicity/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D
[6] https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/monthly-poverty-january-2022
[7] https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/43-children-in-poverty?loc=34&loct=2#ranking/2/any/true/867/any/322

litigation financing. In New York State, according to the most recent COFCCA Workforce Study, caseworkers in 2022 across child welfare programs (family foster care, prevention, and residential foster care programs) had an average turnover rate of 42%. In 2022, front line, child care workers in residential foster care programs across NYS had an average turnover rate of 57%.

This is becoming an increasingly urgent issue. There are very few insurance providers in this sector already, and we are seeing the field get even smaller in recent months. In late August 2024, the Nonprofits Insurance Alliance of California (NIAC), which insured 90% of the foster family agencies (FFAs) in California, announced[8] it would no longer renew insurance coverage for all FFAs in the state beginning October 1, 2024. This change, on such short notice, created a crisis in the sector in California, for which there is currently no statewide solution. Then, in January 2025, the Nonprofits Insurance Alliance (the same company, NIAC, going by a different name outside of California), wrote an update to all of their insured agencies nationwide, stating that effective April 1, 2025 (though reserving the right to do so beforehand) they will not renew umbrella coverage including Improper Sexual Conduct & Physical Abuse (ISCPA), and Social Services Professional coverage for any of their insured foster family agencies nationwide.

If unaddressed, this issue may prevent our member Voluntary Foster Care Agencies here in New York from being able to legally serve children in foster care if they are not able to secure or to pay for adequate liability insurance. If nonprofit providers (which currently provide care for more than 80% of the children and youth in foster care across New York State) cannot provide foster care, the responsibility for the provision of foster care services will shift to the county. Children and youth in foster care are in the care and custody of New York State, and the voluntary foster care agencies are the primary provider of care for children and youth in foster care in the state.

- **COFCCA urges the state to assist the foster care agencies in these insurance access/affordability issues by creating a risk pool or other permanent mechanism to stabilize the insurance market, specifically for not-for-profit child welfare agencies providing foster care in New York State.**

When foster care agencies are able to obtain continued insurance coverage, they are often forced to accept lower coverage levels at higher premiums, all while counties continue to maintain, and/or may continue to increase, their required coverage limits. Agencies reported rate hikes of between 20 to 40% in 2022-2023[9].

A recent report on the Financial Health of Child Welfare Nonprofits in New York State[10] demonstrates that the majority of COFCCA members operate on very thin margins, have little Cash on Hand (an average of 40 days of cash on hand for NYC nonprofit COFCCA agencies, and an average of 45 days of cash on hand for rest of state nonprofit COFCCA agencies), and have no significant endowments or reserves. Agencies do not have the resources to pay for these increased costs.

- **COFCCA requests immediate support provided through the foster care rate methodology, for providers who can demonstrate hardship, to help cover increased premiums foster care agencies are experiencing in their mandated liability insurance coverage in the same fiscal year.**

---

[8] https://www.citybuzz.co/2024/08/21/california-foster-family-agencies-face-insurance-crisis-as-niac-announces-coverage-nonrenewal/

[9] https://www.aei.org/op-eds/justice-at-any-cost/

[10] https://cofcca.wildapricot.org/resources/COFCCA_Final%20General%20Report%20Jan2025.pdf

Ensure Justice for Abuse Survivors

In 2019, the Legislature passed monumental legislation establishing the Child Victims Act, which provided a mechanism to give survivors a voice and an avenue to seek justice. However, without state intervention, individuals may never receive their due compensation and thousands more children will be negatively impacted due to a loss of essential services.

Unfortunately, the number one variable that has nothing to do with a case's credibility or the nature of the harm allegedly suffered is whether there is insurance coverage for a specific case. Many cases do not have any identified coverage for a judgment or settlement. COFCCA has found that of foster care providers surveyed, insurance could not be identified in almost 40% of cases.

Additionally, the older the alleged harm- where the more severe alleged conduct may appear, because child safety and safeguards against abuse have steadily improved over time- the more unlikely there will be coverage or sufficient coverage given policy limits in place at the time. The average age of incidents in cases in our sector is 42.2 years. Due in large part to efforts and support by the legislature to improve services and oversight, the child welfare sector of today looks vastly different than that of 40 years ago.

Today, COFCCA member organizations offer a broad array of programs and services designed to prevent adverse childhood experiences, and to promote child safety and well-being. New York is at risk of losing this network of services due to unintended consequences of CVA.

In a recent COFCCA survey, all of the responding foster care providers reported having contracts with government agencies to provide a variety of critical services in addition to their child welfare related programs, such as:

- Migrant Services: COFCCA member organizations are supporting more than 7,000 families who are migrants and/or seeking asylum in NYC in a number of ways including meeting basic needs and also providing assistance with legal support, work permits, case management, and English language classes.
- Anti-Violence Programs: Programs supported by COFCCA member organizations have contributed to a 40% reduction in gun violence[11] in their program areas in NYC and a 36% decrease in both number of individuals killed by gun violence and shooting incidents with injuries[12] where programs operate in rest of state.
- Homeless Services: There are 85,807 individuals in NYC's homeless shelters, 31,866 of whom are children[13]. COFCCA member organizations provide services through programs such as Runaway and Homeless Youth and independent living programs, and also assist families in obtaining housing and other economic supports as well as mental health, behavioral health, and substance use disorder services to address some of the underlying issues leading to housing insecurity.
- Mental and Behavioral Health Services: Many of our foster care providers, including more than 80% of foster care providers in NYC, provide services that are licensed by state and municipal Offices of Mental Health. Across the state our members provide Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS), Children and Family Treatment and Support Services (CFTSS), and Article 31 clinic services.

[11] https://www.nyc.gov/site/peacenyc/interventions/crisis-management.page
[12] https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-203-million-support-snug-street-outreach-programs-14-communities
[13] https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dailyreport.pdf (2.4.25)

- Special Education Services: Many of our agencies also run Special Act Schools and State approved private non-profit special education schools (853 schools) designed to meet the unique needs of public-school students that cannot be appropriately served in their local school district.

A January 2024 report from SeaChange Capital Partners[14] demonstrates the "existential threat" that faces the child welfare system noting, "[w]ithout support from policymakers, they are at risk of either discontinuing essential services or failing completely." Unfortunately, the prospect of filing for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy – as organizations do not have any fiscal reserves or relief to pursue in providing settlements/awards to victims – has now become a reality for at least three programs[15], including one on Long Island, where CVA cases are being processed faster than in other regions.

We are extremely concerned that it is a sign of things to come as CVA cases move forward elsewhere if the state does not act.

- **COFCCA urgently requests the Legislature and Governor work together with the sector to establish a mechanism to address the costs of Child Victims Act awards that are granted to individuals previously in the care of a Voluntary Foster Care Agency.**

We must create a workable, and immediate path to getting access to justice for survivors who would otherwise be unable to realize financial awards due to lack of agency resources, while also supporting providers' continued ability to meet the demands of New York's children and families in need today.

Ensuring Access to Community-Based Services that Strengthen Families

As mentioned earlier, there has been a significant initiative amongst the state, county, and our voluntary agencies to emphasize preventive care and family supports to keep families together and to prevent entry into the foster care system. This shift has been accelerated by the adoption of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act, passed in 2018. COFCCA sees the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, as an opportunity for the state to make strides toward transforming its child welfare system into one that is intentionally anti-racist, and committed to ensuring family self-determination and strengthening community-based services that meet the needs of New York's diverse communities. New York has yet to draw down federal Title IV-E funding meant to incentivize access to the critical community services that are essential to this goal.

COFCCA looks forward to partnering with the legislature to think creatively about how to ensure maximum state and federal investment in prevention services.

- **COFCCA encourages the state to maximize federal Title IV-E funding under the Family First Prevention Services Act and reinvest savings back into community services, including:**
    - **Primary prevention services as proposed in the Child and Family Well Being Fund.**

Primary prevention is available to all individuals living in a given community, categorically. When a family reaches out for help through primary prevention supports—for example, peer support or concrete economic support (clothing, food, employment needs), families' needs can be met through their neighbors, not through a system. COFCCA supports parents with lived experience in the child welfare system that have led the call for the Child and Family

[14] https://seachangecapitalpartners.app.box.com/s/dhgyd2gqx65i464fhsqth3q2ctpk1ibu

[15] https://thehudsonindependent.com/facing-lawsuits-filed-under-the-states-child-victims-act-st-christophers-files-for-bankruptcy/

Wellbeing Fund as part of the Children and Families Reinvestment Act. The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund would create a flexible and innovative funding program to support efforts to respond to children's and families' needs in communities, with avenues for community input and accountability.

- **Increasing prevention funding to support families safely remaining together: COFCCA urges the state to restore state reimbursement to counties for prevention investment as proposed in A.487 (Hevesi).**

A significant number of COFCCA members provide prevention services across all regions of the State. These programs are meant to serve families by addressing parents' identified needs and assisting them in keeping their families safe, healthy, and together. Services are tailored to individual family need, and may include home-based services and supports when there is a need for housing, food, clothing, mental health and medical services. And it works! Investment into prevention services has contributed to an almost 60% decline[16] in the number of children and youth entering the foster care system statewide since the implementation of the open-ended state reimbursement funding stream.

However, there has not been an increased state investment in prevention services in a number of years. In fact, since 2008, the state budget has reduced the state share for prevention services to 62%, even though there is a statutory requirement of 65%.

- **Support for the Prevention Workforce.**

COFCCA has been collecting turnover data for member agencies for over a decade and has consistently found high turnover rates especially among frontline workers, partly because they can find better-paid jobs with government and for-profit organizations. According to a COFCCA survey of providers in 2022, the NYS Prevention caseworker turnover rate was 43%, double the rate since COFCCA started surveying members in 2011. The average starting salary for an NYS Prevention caseworker (Bachelors) is $45,848 compared to $61,270 in the public sector.

Staffing shortages, vacancies, and turnover are linked to negative practice outcomes. An investment in the prevention 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.

- **COFCCA supports a $195 million investment in children's behavioral health services to support Medicaid rate increases for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS), Children and Family Treatment and Support Services (CFTSS), and Article 31 Clinics to bring the rates closer to the actual cost of providing care.**

We know that there is a shortage in the availability of services to support child and youth mental health, which creates wait lists for treatment. The Healthy Minds Healthy Kids Campaign (HMHK), a collaboration between 19 of New York's leading children's and behavioral health advocacy groups, commissioned a study that found what our providers have said for years: the rates in children's outpatient services are inadequate to cover costs, let alone support a sustainable system for the future.

- **COFCCA supports creating a Youth Justice Innovation Fund (A767 (Solages)/S643 (Cleare), which will help move more state funding to community-based organizations (CBOs) serving young people and families who are justice involved or are at risk of being justice involved.**

---

[16] https://ocfs.ny.gov/reports/maps/aggregate.php

Recently it was reported there is $980 million in unused Raise the Age Funds[17]. These funds are intended to support Raise the Age legislation by funding wraparound services for young people who are justice involved or at risk of involvement. In addition to the unused funds, New York City has yet to receive any of these dollars. As young people display more complex needs, we know that the funds would be well utilized to support current community needs across New York.

The Youth Justice Innovation Fund would direct $50 million of the annual $250 million Raise the Age appropriation to fund CBOs who provide services that are shown to reduce contact with the justice system and/or prevent further court involvement for youth age 12 through 25.

Ensuring Children and Youth in Foster Care Have Access to Dental Care

Our member agencies are charged with taking care of children's holistic needs. For the period of time they are in foster care, they assess and address their mental, physical, dental, and behavioral healthcare needs. However, our Article 29-I providers indicate significant issues in obtaining dental care for children and youth in foster care.

COFCCA has been raising issues regarding accessing dental care for children and youth in foster care since the onset of our transition to Managed Care in July of 2021, now over 3 years ago. We have not seen the situation improve for the children and youth in our care and we are asking the state for action, with urgency.

- **COFCCA urges the legislature to include Article 29-I facilities in provisions expanding the Scope of Practice of Dental Hygienists under Collaborative Agreements to provide on-site access to screening and preventative care for children and youth in foster care** (HMH, Part X)**.**

Prior to the transition to managed care, agencies addressed the dental needs of their children - and are no longer able to do that. Agencies had relationships with community dentists and paid them directly. Access was not a problem. We understand that this is an issue for the general Medicaid population and that this is an issue not restricted to NYS. When a child is in pain and cannot be seen by a dentist or pedodontist, periodontist, endodontist or oral surgeon, it is extremely difficult - in fact it is gut wrenching to watch as a child waits for care.

- **COFCCA strongly encourages the state to create a mechanism to reimburse agencies to take their children to community dentists and pay them at community rates while efforts to resolve the access issues are under review.**

We understand that the general Medicaid population has access to dental care issues, and this is an issue not restricted to New York State. But there is an urgent need for an interim solution for children in foster care who are suffering without access to dental providers.

Supporting Families and Youth as they Transition Out of Care

New York State has committed funding in the budget for several years to assist youth in foster care as they pursue higher education. We have watched with great joy each year as our young people in foster care enter college or university through the support of the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI). In the last several years, this initiative has supported more than 2,000 young people in our state during their college journeys. These young people have attended more than 100 NYS colleges and universities and they are achieving success through post-secondary

[17] https://www.politico.com/news/2025/01/16/new-york-raise-the-age-00197473

education. The FYCSI program uniquely provides necessary social, academic, and financial supports to ensure that barriers to opportunity for the foster care population are mitigated.

- **COFCCA supports increasing investment in the Foster Youth College Success Initiative to $10 million to continue to assist youth in foster care in achieving their goals.**

Homelessness and housing instability are among the reasons families are reported to the State Central Register,[18] and housing is a major concern for 41% of youth who are aging out of the child welfare system.[19] The goals of the Child Welfare Housing Subsidy program are to stabilize housing for families and prevent family separation and child removals, to expedite reunification of children in foster care, and to help youth aging out of foster care who face high risk of housing instability and homelessness. COFCCA and our partners had advocated for an increase in the maximum monthly voucher amount under this program for years, and we were thrilled to see the increase from $300 to $725 included in the 2023-24 Enacted Budget.

However, because of the upper age limit of 21, individuals "aging out" of foster care after the age of 18, are unable to receive the subsidy for the full program period, or possibly at all.

- **COFCCA supports further expanding the Child Welfare Housing Subsidy to increase support for foster youth leaving care by increasing the upper age limit from 21 to 24 as proposed in A.735 (Hevesi).**

This bill will ensure that youth "aging out" of foster care up to age 21 are able to avail themselves of the subsidy when they are transitioning to independent living – exactly when they need it most. We also urge the state to index growth for the voucher amount.

In closing, we must ensure that the final state budget includes investments in our child welfare workforce, community-based supports and services, and thoughtful policy solutions to challenges nonprofit child welfare programs currently face.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

---

[18] https://scaany.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/02/Child-Family-Wellbeing-Fund-One-pager_02012023.pdf
[19] https://readymag.com/fysa/movingforward/