



2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing

Human Services

Thursday, February 5, 2026

Testimony by

Ann Marie Scalia, Chief Executive Officer

Chair Pretlow, Chair Krueger, Chair Brisport, Chair Hevesi, Chair Persaud, Chair Davila, Chair Fahy, Chair Santa Barbara, and members of the Committees, thank you for calling this hearing and inviting JCCA to submit testimony on behalf of the children and families to whom we provide services.

My name is Ann Marie Scalia, and I am the new Chief Executive Officer at JCCA. Prior to joining JCCA, and for the past 11 years, I served as General Counsel and Chief Legal Officer at NYC's Department of Social Services. That work centered on removing barriers so that families and children could more easily access services that keep them safe. I started my career helping young people at The Legal Aid Society representing children and youth in family court.

JCCA is a child and family services agency that works with about 17,000 of New York State's children and families each year. We provide foster care, residential, prevention, educational, and behavioral health services to young people across the five boroughs and Westchester County.

## **Children in Foster Homes and Residential Treatment Centers**

I am here today to discuss the extreme challenges facing the organizations like JCCA that care for children in foster homes and residential treatment centers (RTC). Research shows that young people in foster care disproportionately struggle with mental health challenges and are more likely to experience negative long-term health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> In order to adequately meet the needs of young people, we are asking child welfare professionals to do more, without providing proper compensation.

On JCCA's residential campus, we care for young people who have suffered the trauma of parental separation and, in many cases, repeated moves among foster families prior to their arrival. Similar to other residential programs, we aim to provide a highly structured therapeutic environment for youth to heal and leave campus and achieve success. However, we are struggling to deliver the wholistic therapeutic experience that youth need.

JCCA and our peer organizations are experiencing a workforce crisis, and it impacts the children and families we serve. Children in foster care, particularly those on residential campuses, experience unstable the impact of an unstable workforce.

### **What can New York State do?**

#### **1. Advocate to sufficiently fund Article 29-I Programs to maintain a steady team of well-trained clinicians.**

Foster care and residential providers are partially paid through Article 29-I funding to cover the basics or "Core Rate" such as nursing care management. Organizations then bill "encounters" to cover the deficit. However, the reimbursement rates for encounters do not cover the gap. For example, nurses are reimbursed \$2 for vaccinations. For JCCA to be the youth's primary care provider, we lose money. As a result, we cannot pay market salaries to our clinical staff when

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<sup>1</sup> Engler AD, Sarpong KO, Van Horne BS, Greeley CS, Keefe RJ. A systematic review of mental health disorders of children in foster care. *Trauma Violence Abuse*. 2022;23(1):255-264

we struggle against a deficit. We need New York to raise both the Core and Medicaid rates.

With appropriate funding, we could provide more robust treatment for youth and avoid potentially costly ER visits.

**2. Advocate for foster care and residential staff salaries to be increased to maintain a consistent and experienced workforce.**

First, I must thank the leadership here today that loudly and consistently advocates on behalf of human service workers. We strongly endorse:

- Passage of S.1580 (Persaud)/A.2590 (Hevesi) and S.3669 (Persaud) to ensure programs historically excluded from budget increases are included so that all State-contracted human services programs receive this adjustment.
- Ensuring that Foster Care providers are fully supported by Targeted inflationary Increases by ensuring that the MSAR includes these investments each year ("COLA Stacking" Bill- A.718 Hevesi).
- Increasing the Governor's proposed 1.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase to 2.7% TII.

However, even with these efforts to adjust for inflation, our staff's salaries are too low. In some programs, we are experiencing a 50% turnover rate among staff as a result. This type of turnover directly impacts the continuity of care that children and young people receive.

Specifically, it makes it harder for youth who experienced trauma to establish a trusting relationship with a clinician, residential youth counselor (RYC), and other client-support staff.

Although staff who choose to work with children are passionate about helping and working with children, the pay becomes unsustainable. Our RYC pay rate is \$18.50 to \$24 per hour. This barely exceeds New York's minimum wage of \$17 in the areas we serve. Yet our RYCs are the first to help a youth de-escalate when they are in crisis, model and teach youth to resolve conflict, and empower youth through their daily accomplishments. RYCs are our first

responders and should be compensated as appropriate with the services they provide- which is more than \$1.50 over minimum wage.

### **Conclusion**

Children who have experienced the trauma of being separated from their parents, among other struggles, require the support of experienced professionals with continuity in their relationships. Until the State helps us address adequate funding for Article 29-I programs and our foster and residential care workforce, children who are wards of the state will not receive the support they need.