



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 Santabarbara, 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 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.¹ In order to adequately meet the needs of young people, we are asking child welfare professionals to do more, without providing proper compensation.

JCCA's residential treatment center cares for young people who have suffered the trauma of parental separation and, in many cases, repeated moves among foster families prior to their arrival. We work hard to provide a highly structured therapeutic environment for youth to heal, leave campus, and achieve success. However, we are struggling to deliver the holistic 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, are detrimentally impacted by this instability.

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 agencies providing both community and residential services used to be paid a flat rate that included both room/board; clinical (therapy); and medical services within their daily rate. This has been changed, with clinical and medical services being carved out and paid through 29i services in the form of a "core" dollars, which are also able to be supplemented with the ability to bill "encounters". The CORE rate is not sufficient to properly staff these clinical positions, even with encounters supplementing payment. The problem is two-fold: 1.) non-profit

¹ 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

clinical/medical salaries do not match market rate and therefore non-profits are not competitive in the hiring process to staff these positions, while they are still required to provide care and oversight of youth. 2.) The reimbursement rates for encounters are poor, particularly because volume is less than a healthcare setting. For example, vaccine administration is reimbursed at a rate of \$2, per encounter. Providers are left with significant deficits working to provide clinical and medical services to a fragile and high-risk population, that is ultimately at risk of utilizing higher and more expensive interventions such as ER visits in place of primary care.

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 advocate 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 rate is consistent with the 48% turnover statewide for residential child care workers and 33% turnover statewide for caseworkers, as reported by COFCCA.² This type of turnover directly impacts the

² See COFCCA 2024 Child Welfare Workforce Compensation Report based on data from 54 agencies operating 99 residential, family foster boarding home, and prevention programs across New York State.

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.