



The New York City Administration for Children's Services
Gladys Carrión, Commissioner
Testimony to the New York City Council
Committees on General Welfare, Juvenile Justice, Women's Issues, and Finance
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"New York City Council Fiscal Year 2015 Executive Budget Hearings"

Good morning Chairs Levin, Cabrera, Cumbo, and Ferreras, and members of the General Welfare, Juvenile Justice, Women's Issues, and Finance Committees. I am Gladys Carrión, the Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services, and with me today is Susan Nuccio, our Deputy Commissioner for Financial Services. I am pleased to be back before the Council to continue discussing our ongoing work to protect and support New York City's children, young people, and families. Thank you for the opportunity to update you on our 2015 Executive Budget and to share the progress we have made on our child welfare reform efforts and on our participation in New York City's Universal Pre-Kindergarten programming.

Children's Services budget for Fiscal Year 2015 provides for operating expenses of \$2.9 billion, of which approximately \$876 million is city tax levy. We are thankful that we have not had to make any cuts to our agency budget in this cycle, as we have had to do in previous years. In fact, I am very pleased to announce the significant investments that this Executive budget is allowing ACS to make in protecting children and assisting New York City's neediest families.

Child Welfare Reform Efforts

The primary mission of the Administration for Children's Services is to keep New York City's children safe and well. As I testified earlier this month before the General Welfare Committee, New York City has been saddened by the tragic deaths of young children this winter and spring. After reviewing those cases in depth, Mayor de Blasio, Deputy Mayor Barrios-Paoli, and I announced recommendations related to child welfare case practice and citywide partnerships, including bolstering our approach to the highest risk cases, improving collaboration with our provider partners and other city and state agencies, and creating a public awareness campaign. To implement some of these recommendations, our Executive Budget will allow us

to add a total of 362 new positions at a cost of \$25.3 million to the four ACS divisions that handle child welfare cases: child protection, preventive services, foster care and Family Court Legal Services.

Central to our reform efforts is strengthening our overall practice with a heightened focus of our highest risk cases—some of which include cases where children remain in their homes under ACS supervision by order of the Family Court. The ACS staff that monitors the safety and risk of the children involved in these cases is called the Family Services Unit (FSU), which is comprised of Child Protective Specialists who monitor children in the context of their families and assess safety and risk. Where appropriate, FSU staff link families to services and programs, including preventive services, public assistance and other benefits, education, prenatal assistance, substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence, vocational services and Child Care and Head Start programs.

A significant portion of our increased funding will be allocated to expanding and redesigning the Family Services Unit within our Child Protective Services Division. We are adding 229 positions at a cost of \$12.5 million. These positions will allow us to reduce the average FSU caseloads from twelve to eight cases per CPS worker.

We are also reorganizing the management structure of our child protective field units in the two largest boroughs – in the Bronx and Brooklyn. Given the size of those boroughs, the number of state central register (SCR) reports received each year from these two boroughs, as well as the nature of the cases, we have decided to split Brooklyn and the Bronx so that both boroughs have two distinct ACS management teams, each with their own leadership. The goal of the split is to allow us to enhance our ability to engage and assess families, and permit closer oversight, coaching and supervision of the staff, particularly in complex cases. In addition to

supporting improved outcomes for our families and children, additional management units in both boroughs will also lead to a better supported workforce.

To enhance our ability to manage our high risk preventive and foster care cases, ACS will allocate approximately \$6.5 million to create new internal Case Monitoring and Compliance (CMC) Units that will work with our contracted providers on high risk cases. These units will include a team of Investigative Consultants, former NYPD detectives who assist with investigations. The CMC Units will monitor providers' approach to safety and risk issues and assess their progress in reducing risk, as well as the need for additional action. The unit will also apply appropriate standards for case closing.

We are also enhancing case monitoring and compliance within our Family Court Legal Services (FCLS) Division. To that end, we are adding 35 positions totaling \$2.3 million. The additional lawyers will assist FCLS' capacity to counsel Child Protective staff and staff within the Case Monitoring and Compliance Units. The increase in staffing will also allow us to reduce our attorney caseloads from approximately 75 to 65 cases per attorney.

Finally, as I testified last week, to oversee our child welfare reforms, I have appointed Jeanne Milstein, the former Connecticut Child Advocate and Deputy Commissioner of Strategic Planning and Policy Planning at the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, as our internal monitor. Ms. Milstein reports directly to me and is coordinating the improvement of policies and practices across the child welfare system, and revamping of our response to child fatalities and critical incidents.

In addition to these new hires and structural changes, ACS continues to implement the reforms that the Mayor announced in January. We are re-evaluating our communication with and the oversight we provide to our preventive and foster care provider agencies to ensure that

we all are making child welfare decisions in the most well-informed, timely, and flexible manner possible. The preliminary review of our system indicates that it is based on a solid foundation but could be executed better. As a first step, I have been meeting with the executive directors of all our agencies to underscore that safety is paramount and that our providers and ACS must work together to address risk assessment and practice challenges.

We are also improving our collaboration with other city agencies. Mayor de Blasio has made interagency collaboration a priority of his administration. On April 7, he announced the creation of the New York City Children's Cabinet with the goal of promoting ongoing, consistent and meaningful communication among city agencies to ensure child safety and well-being. The City's Children's Cabinet, which includes over twenty city agencies, met for the first time at the end of April. Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Commissioner Dr. Mary Bassett, Deputy Mayor Richard Buery and I outlined a public health approach to child welfare, which includes a wide continuum of prevention activities that extend beyond providing direct services to individual families.

Early Care and Education

As we testified in March, ACS and the Department of Education (DOE) will implement the Mayor's commitment to provide, high-quality, full-day, free Universal Pre-kindergarten (UPK) to all four-year-olds in New York City beginning this September 2014. ACS is aiming to serve over 12,000 four-year-olds through *EarlyLearn NYC*. For Fiscal Year 2015, \$44 million was added to our budget to ensure free services of consistent quality and support for teachers, including a full-day of standards-based UPK programming, increased support for students whose primary language is not English, increased access to professional

development for teachers, and increased investments to recruit and retain high-quality UPK lead teachers with early childhood certifications.

UPK seats will comprise only a portion of the seats in our contracted system, *EarlyLearn NYC*. Currently, 137 ACS contracted providers serve over 32,000 children in 364 centers and in 1,633 Family Child Care providers' homes across the five boroughs. I am happy to share that our center-based enrollment is up to 90%. ACS continues to work with our providers to ensure that they have the support they need and that families are aware of the nearest *EarlyLearn NYC* center in their neighborhoods.

Given some of the concerns that were raised when *EarlyLearn NYC* launched in 2012, many of our providers, parents and Councilmembers understandably are eager to know the future of *EarlyLearn NYC*. Recognizing the need for an integrated and quality child care system, the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, in partnership with ACS, is leading a task force of key stakeholders to review the current early care and education system and identify ways to support quality across the system. We are eager to share the recommendations set forth by the task force and next steps for our subsidized early care and education system in the coming months.

Juvenile Justice

Approximately 8,000 young people under the age of 16 are arrested in New York City each year – almost all of them have suffered some kind of trauma in their lives. The 2015 Executive Budget adds \$2.2 million to improve the quality of existing health and mental health services for youth in detention and to repair and maintain the City's detention facilities. The funding will help to stabilize DYFJ's psychiatry services by making the resources for contracts

competitive in today's market; improving the available hours of on-site coverage; and expanding the scope of mental health services by working with health care providers to include more extensive psychological testing and clinical assessments.

As we have testified previously, many young people who have engaged in delinquent behavior have a history that involves abuse or neglect. We continue to prioritize our work with "crossover youth" – those who are involved in both our child welfare and juvenile justice systems. ACS is implementing a "Crossover Youth Practice Model," which recognizes that we must build on individual and family strengths in order to help young people overcome challenges. We collaborated closely with Family Court partners to launch a pilot program designed to improve on-going work between juvenile justice and child welfare partners and family members in the Bronx in April 2014. We anticipate launching the model in Brooklyn in the Fall 2014 and all of the other boroughs will begin implementation in 2015.

In addition, in partnership with Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), ACS has begun a targeted campaign to recruit qualified, compassionate, and dedicated Juvenile Counselors. Juvenile Counselors are front line staff who work directly with detained young people to provide structure, guidance, supervision, and counseling while they are in detention. DCAS has scheduled numerous testing dates for those qualified to take the Juvenile Counselor Civil Service Exam and ACS is disseminating information directing applicants to the ACS and DCAS websites for registration. If you have any constituents who may be interested, please let them know of this opportunity to work with our youth.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to update you on our efforts to strengthen the work of ACS so that we can ensure the safety and well-being for New York City's children.