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Testimony to the New York City Council
Committees on General Welfare, Juvenile Justice, and Women's Issues
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"New York City Council Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Budget Hearing"

Good morning Chairs Levin, Cumbo, and Cabrera, and members of the Finance, General Welfare, Women's Issues, and Juvenile Justice Committees. I am Gladys Carrión, Commissioner of New York City's Administration for Children's Services. With me today is Susan Nuccio, Deputy Commissioner of Financial Services. I appreciate having this opportunity to brief you on the preliminary budget and to update you on Children's Services' ongoing work to protect and support New York's vulnerable children and families.

Overview

Children's Services budget for the 2016 preliminary budget plan provides for operating expenses of \$2.95 billion, of which approximately \$907 million is city tax levy. This is an increase of last year's Adopted 2015 budget of \$2.91 billion and approximate \$895 million city tax levy funding. The twelve million dollar City Tax Levy increase is due to the new funding added in the 2015 Executive and the 2016 Preliminary Budgets – funding that has been added primarily to support child welfare reforms.

Child Welfare and Reform Efforts

For too long, the world of child welfare has focused on protecting children without paying attention to how they are *doing*. Promoting the well-being of the children must be as important as keeping them safe and stable. All of the initiatives that comprise our preliminary 2016 budget are oriented toward these goals: safety, permanency **and** well-being.

ACS' child welfare work is threefold and involves protective, preventive and foster care services. Each year we investigate over 60,000 reports of maltreatment, and

we provide preventive services to over 25,000 families so children can remain safely at home. And, when out-of-home placements are necessary, we oversee approximately 11,000 children in foster care. ACS depends on over 2,000 dedicated frontline staff to make difficult decisions that have profound consequences in the lives of children and families. I am so pleased to announce that the preliminary 2016 budget positions ACS to make the most significant investment in our workforce and child welfare practice in over decade. As proposed, the budget will also help ACS strengthen our ability to provide intensive services to families, and to better identify which families could benefit the most from these services.

Early in the de Blasio administration, ACS embarked on a series of reforms to bolster our child welfare practice. All of the initiatives related to last year's Operation S.A.F.E are well underway: we are in the process of hiring 362 new positions, including 130 new Child Protective Specialists; creating 23 new Family Services Units, which oversee our highest risk cases; and adding three new units in Emergency Children's Services, which initiate child protective investigations overnight and during weekends. ACS has also hired 35 new attorney and administrative staff within our Division of Family Court Legal Services to support our legal efforts in Family Court to promote positive outcomes for vulnerable children and families and to help assess the appropriate level of supervision in high risk cases.

As we expand our frontline staff, we must make sure they are constantly strengthened, developed and supported throughout their careers. The Preliminary Budget allocates \$9.79 million to establish an ACS Workforce Institute, in partnership with CUNY and our nonprofit provider agencies. This institute will support professional

development opportunities similar to those offered by other helping professions, such as teaching and medicine. Every child welfare worker will have meaningful educational opportunities, from the latest in brain science and evidence-based mental health programs, to the most effective family engagement strategies. In addition to serving all of our frontline staff, the institute will also support our provider partners, which include more than 2,000 preventive and foster care case workers employed by our contracted providers. The institute will feature a curriculum developed by experts in the child welfare and educational fields and provide a full catalogue of courses with simulated and experiential learning. ACS is also developing a comprehensive coaching model which will reinforce a culture of supportive supervision and continuous improvement in our work.

The most important and challenging decisions our child protective professionals must make relate to assessing risk. The preliminary budget funds ACS to develop a “predictive” risk-assessment data tool that will bolster our capacity to target appropriate support services and interventions. We will join other jurisdictions, like California, Michigan, and Florida, who already use aggregated data compiled from hundreds of thousands of child welfare cases to understand what factors predict whether a family may be the subject of a future substantiated report. Some of these factors include histories of foster care placement, past incidence of domestic violence, level of prior ACS involvement, and incidents of homelessness. By combining these factors in an analytic database, frontline staff at different stages of a case will be better able to identify highest risk families and ensure that they receive a higher level of supportive interventions that can help prevent maltreatment and future system involvement.

Experiencing the stress and trauma of poverty, homelessness, depression, substance abuse, and violence places extraordinary challenges on parents and their children, especially those who are under five years of age. Research shows that children at highest risk of severe neglect or injury are those whose bond with their caregivers is not strong. The 2016 budget proposes that ACS adds 240 new slots of evidenced-based preventive services focused on these high-risk families with young children. We believe that the additional investment in evidence-based clinical mental health services for parents with trauma, as well as mental health services for parents and very young children, will provide tremendous support to this vulnerable population.

Families and children experiencing housing instability and homelessness are among the city's most vulnerable citizens. At any given time, about one quarter of the families in homeless shelters are actively involved with ACS. Since the beginning of Mayor de Blasio's administration, ACS has, in close collaboration with DHS, developed a series of new measures to better understand the needs of ACS child welfare-involved families in shelters and to increase interagency coordination to ensure proper services and supports. Under the 2016 budget, ACS will re-establish two Child Protection Units at the PATH Center in the Bronx. These new units will be comprised of one Child Protection Manager, two Child Protective Supervisors, and ten Child Protective Specialists. Working in tandem with DHS intake staff, these units will assess the needs and risk of incoming ACS involved families and help them access a wide array of preventive services, community supports, and childcare. In addition, this spring, ACS will conduct an enrollment drive to ensure that every child in a DHS shelter under five has access to child care.

Finally, of all the fatalities of children known to our child welfare system, half involved infant deaths related to unsafe sleeping conditions. Practices like sharing a bed with an infant, having objects in the crib, and placing infants on their stomachs can be dangerous. Using a public health approach, we are working with agencies like the Health and Hospitals Corporation, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, community based organizations, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the private sector, to develop a coordinated public awareness campaign. The proposed budget allows ACS to hire outreach liaisons, whose work will include engaging community members, developing local strategies, and distributing educational materials related to safe sleeping practices. We look forward to partnering with the Council on this important initiative.

Early Care and Education

Considering the impact that quality early education has on the development of cognitive, social, and emotional skills for all children, especially those coming from highly stressed environments is integral to ACS' work of strengthening and supporting families. ACS is deeply invested in moving toward a coordinated and aligned early care and education system that provides quality services for all children.

As many of you know, in December ACS issued an RFP to award \$56 million in new *EarlyLearn NYC* services. The RFP targeted 39 zip codes in locations where the City Council has funded child care services for the past several years. ACS is currently reviewing the submissions and we expect to announce recommended awards for approximately 4,800 *EarlyLearn NYC* seats by the end of April. We recognize that the

transition to *EarlyLearn* may present new challenges for some providers and so we look forward to continued communication with the Council in the months ahead. We are excited to bring in new providers and serve additional communities with quality early care and education services.

Juvenile Justice

The time has come for New York State to offer developmentally appropriate services to the 16 and 17 year olds who come to the attention of the justice system. This will be accomplished when the state passes the proposed legislation raising the age of criminal responsibility, which ACS strongly supports. One of the existing functions of ACS is to work with juvenile justice involved youth to promote public safety and improve the lives of young people, families, and communities by providing therapeutic treatment, safe and secure custodial care, responsive health care, effective re-entry services, and promoting educational achievement. Raise the Age will allow our agency to extend these interventions, services and care to the 16 and 17 year olds who need and can benefit from them.

ACS is committed to providing young people in our juvenile justice programs with safe and secure environments as well as programming and exposure to experiences that encourage youth to thrive. We firmly believe that preventive services for youth in crisis are imperative and out-of-home juvenile justice placement is, and should be, our last option. As such, I am happy to report that the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services extended their contract with ACS, NY Foundling and the Center for Court Innovation, to provide alternative to detention (ATD) services to youth in Queens.

These services address the needs of youth who are at risk of detention due solely to family instability or conflict rather than public safety or failure-to-appear. The initial funding timeline for this program was March 2013 through December 2014 and was recently extended by DCJS through December 2015 with an additional \$ 333,000 in funding.

To better serve youth in secure detention, we are looking to add significant funding to improve the infrastructures of the two facilities that we directly operate. We are moving forward with large scale renovations that will include: the creation of a psychiatric medical suite in both Crossroads and Horizon; classroom updates and upgrades; energy, lighting, roofing and plumbing upgrades; kitchen equipment upgrades; and outdoor recreation area enhancements. We believe these physical enhancements will greatly improve young people's experience while in our care.

I am excited to announce that Limited Secure Placement (LSP), Phase II of Close to Home, will officially launch next month. We experienced some challenges with respect to construction and renovation of the LSP sites, however our three non-profit partner provider agencies have hired over 300 staff, conducted numerous trainings during the past 6 weeks and are on track to begin accepting LSP youth. Each of the six sites will serve twelve to twenty youth, for a total projected census of approximately 100 young people in the LSP system.

Conclusion

It is my sincere hope that as I endeavor to continue to strengthen the work of ACS, I can also reframe our work to impact on well-being that speak to the success of

our young people. I would also like to thank our dedicated workforce for their tireless efforts to support the children and families of New York City. I look forward to a continued productive collaboration with the City Council. Thank you for your time this morning. I welcome your comments and questions.