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ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES RECOGNIZES WORLDPRIDE BY LEADING THE CITY'S FIRST-EVER PUBLIC DIALOGUE ADDRESSING THE DISPARITIES FACED BY LGBTQ YOUTH INVOLVED IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM & LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

Across the Country, 1 in 5 Young People in Foster Care & Up to 15 Percent of Young People in Juvenile Justice Settings Identify as LGBTQ; Child Welfare Professionals, Advocates, & Youth Join Together In An Effort to Build a Better Future for LGBTQ Youth in Care

NEW YORK, NY – Today, in conjunction with the World Pride celebration, the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) hosted its first-ever "LGBTQ Youth in Child Welfare Convening" in an effort to raise awareness about the disparities that impact LGBTQ youth in the child welfare system and explore the ways in which New York City can promote more equitable outcomes for these youth and their families. Commissioner David A. Hansell participated in the event, along with other child welfare professionals, advocates, policymakers and youth.

Across the country, LGBTQ youth are over-represented in the foster care system. Studies have found that approximately 1 in 5 young people in foster care, and up to 15 percent of young people in juvenile justice settings identify as LGBTQ. High rates of family rejection may contribute to this overrepresentation. Evidence demonstrates that LGBTQ youth are far more likely than their peers to experience an array of social, physical, and mental health disparities—from dating violence to bullying to homelessness to attempted suicide.

"As Commissioner of ACS, I feel that it is absolutely vital for ACS to build on its work and commitment to support LGBTQ youth and families in New York City and that's why today's convening is so important," **said ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell.** "We have among the most progressive LGBTQ policies and practices within child welfare and juvenile justice systems across the country, but there is always more to be done to ensure that our young people are safe and supported. With the eyes of the world focused on NYC as a welcoming environment for all LGBTQ communities, today's convening will help us as we continue to break down barriers and create an environment where all young people feel like that can do anything they set their minds to."

At the convening, Jazmine Perez, a transgender Latina community advocate, shared her first-hand experiences of growing up in the foster care system and how it has evolved over time. Now, Ms. Perez works as a social worker helping LGBTQ young people of color in the Bronx.

“The convening is a critical call to action for city leaders and community partners to come together to identify the types of adversities LGBTQ youth face and strategize on how we can respond with the best possible resources,” **said Jazmine Pérez, LMSW.** “I am committed to finding real solutions to ensure that no LGBTQ youth is left behind, and I want to thank the Administration for Children’s Services for shining a light on this important issue.”

In addition to Ms. Perez’s speech, the convening included a panel of child welfare professionals who discussed innovations and best practices when working with LGBTQ youth as well as a panel of parents and youth who discussed the importance of family acceptance.

ACS has one of the most progressive LGBTQ policies within the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The ACS Office of LGBTQ Equity Strategies was created to raise awareness and help make sure the agency’s services are affirming of LGBTQ youth and families. Through this Office (and its precursor, the Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice), ACS has made great strides to develop and improve services for LGBTQ youth, including:

- Implementation of a comprehensive non-discrimination policy;
- Requiring mandatory training for foster parents so that they are all LGBTQ affirming;
- Creating a LGBTQ Youth Empowerment Group (YEG), made up of current and former LGBTQ youth with foster care or juvenile justice experience (ages 18 & up), to help ACS better understand their strengths, interests and needs;
- Formed the LGBTQ Foster Care Project in collaboration with the New York City LGBTQ Community Center to help recruit and train LGBTQ and Ally foster parents;
- Developed a series of model trainings specifically for NYC child welfare and youth justice staff to help them understand our policy expectations and to provide concrete skills to translate our LGBTQ policies into everyday practice;
- Created an LGBTQ Incident & Inquiry Reporting system to allow youth, providers, staff, and foster families to ask questions related to our LGBTQ policy or to report alleged policy non-compliance;
- Compiled an extensive database of LGBTQ-affirming resources ranging from housing programs to mental health providers to places of worship.

“I commend The Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) for working towards raising awareness on the hardships that LGBTQ youth in the foster care system face and for promoting better outcomes for them and their families,” **said New York State Senator Roxanne J. Persaud.** “It is crucial we provide services that will protect and support these youth on their way to securing a loving family and a safe home. New York City must do everything possible to achieve positive outcomes for every child in the child welfare system.”

“Making sure LGBTQ youth have every resource available to them, regardless of where they live or what community they come from, must be an absolute priority for New York. When we recognize the obstacles these young people face, often at a disproportionate rate than their heterosexual peers, we are better able to serve as their advocates. I’m so proud that our Democratic majority was able to pass legislation in Albany banning the despicable practice of so-called conversion therapy and securing more resources for LGBTQ runaway youth. As we approach the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, I’m grateful to the Administration for Children’s Services for building on this year of progress for LGBTQ New Yorkers by spearheading this groundbreaking initiative,” **said New York State Senator Brad Hoylman.**

"LGBTQ youth face unique hardships that no child should have to endure. I commend ACS for recognizing these hardships and working to remove them from the child welfare system in order to provide the best possible services to youth regardless of their sexual orientation or gender expression," **said New York State Assemblyman Hevesi.**

"LGBTQ youth involved in NYC's child welfare system face significant challenges in our society. I am pleased that ACS is focusing on how to best serve them," **said Council Member Daniel Dromm.** "ACS has made improved care for LGBTQ young people a priority in recent years. I thank Commissioner Hansell for continuing to move the agency forward in this respect. This is an incredibly meaningful way of commemorating World Pride and the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising."

"LGBTQ youth need and deserve all of the support and opportunities we can offer them—especially those in the child welfare system—and I thank ACS for beginning this important dialogue," **said Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer.**

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