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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 Executive Budget Hearing"

Good afternoon Chairs Ferreras, Cumbo, Levin, and Cabrera and members of the Finance, Women's Issues, General Welfare, and Juvenile Justice 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 and Jill Krauss, Deputy Commissioner for Communications and Community Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to update you on our 2016 Executive Budget and to address the improvements that ACS is making to our systems, for our providers, and most importantly for the children and families that we serve.

Children's Services' mission is to promote the safety, permanency and well-being of New York City's children and young people. Those who are served by the child welfare, juvenile justice, and in subsidized child care systems deserve nothing less than what we provide for our children: access to a good education, quality services to meet their physical and emotional needs, continuous support from and connections to stable adults and the ability to transition into young adulthood and maintain positive healthy relationships throughout their lives. With this in mind, the agency is increasingly focused on child well-being.

This administration's commitment to serving vulnerable New Yorkers allows ACS to focus on the well-being of young people in our care. Since Mayor de Blasio took office, I am very proud to report that ACS has committed nearly 700 new positions dedicated to supporting and protecting children and families, ten of which are self-funded. The staff increases are a result of the reform work on which I have previously briefed the Council - including Operation SAFE, which dedicated 368 (six of which are self-funded) positions to protect some of our most challenged families, as well as 83

positions to strengthen supervision and training and to develop new initiatives. Since the preliminary budget, an additional 225 positions will be funded to support our work.

Budget Overview

ACS' operating budget for Fiscal Year 2016 provides for operating expenses of \$2.9 billion, \$902 million, of which are City funds. In the Executive 2016 budget, ACS gained \$28.7 million in funding for new needs, of which \$21.3 million is City Tax Levy dollars, which will be used to expand access to and oversight of our Early Care and Education system, to improve services at the Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center, and to increase the administrative functions of the agency, including additional Information Technology staff.

Improvements for ACS Systems

Early Care and Education

The 2016 ACS Budget proposes adding over \$19 million new dollars to bolster our Early Care and Education Services in several areas. In order to improve the stability and quality of the services in contracted settings, when fully implemented Fiscal Year 17, \$5.9 million dollars will fund 63 new positions, four of which are self-funded. ACS will hire 23 staff to ensure compliance with *EarlyLearn* and Head Start contract requirements and provide technical assistance and training to contracted providers. We also will hire 24 maintenance and building trades' staff to allow a timelier and more cost efficient response to facility issues, seven staff to analyze data and maintain new software systems and nine overhead staff to support this early education improvement plan.

ACS will also expand access to services. The administration has baselined \$12.6 million dollars to fund low income vouchers. The Council and Administration jointly funded this effort last year in order to provide care to families who had been on the waiting list to receive low income vouchers. We expect the baselined \$12.6 million to fund approximately 1,700 children from low income families to receive a full year of subsidized care.

Finally, ACS is using almost one million to reduce the fee paid by parents whose children receive part-time care in *EarlyLearn* settings. Most of our *EarlyLearn* programs are funded by UPK dollars. UPK, which is a free program, is now funding a larger portion of the day, so ACS is decreasing parent fees correspondingly, which will provide some relief to our 5,500 families who pay a part-time fee.

Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center

In order to better meet the medical and programmatic needs of children newly placed into care, ACS is creating 117 new positions at the Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center at a cost of \$5.9 million, of which \$2.4 million is City Tax Levy. The enhancement will enable ACS to replace nursing, child care, and support positions that are currently contracted through a temporary employment agency with permanent city employee positions. Because the Children's Center serves significant numbers of medically fragile children, as well as those who present behavioral challenges, we must be able to rely on permanent staff, especially on nights, weekends and holidays to maintain a safe and supportive environment. To achieve this stability, we are adding 18 nursing staff and 99 congregate care staff – child care supervisors and managers,

educational and recreational specialist and play therapists – including a conversion of existing contracted temporary services into permanent positions.

ACS Office of Information Technology

ACS' Office of Information Technology provides IT services including systems development, database management, network and telecommunication services, and desktop support, each of which are integral to the work that we and our contracted providers undertake. When fully implemented in 2017, a total of \$3.7 million will be dedicated to support this office. With new funds, we will replace 20 consultants with full-time employees and add 13 new positions. These 33 key positions will bring in leadership-level experience and maintain a consistent knowledge base within the division to allow for a greater ability to plan and implement IT system improvements that will benefit ACS' workforce of over 7,000 staff.

Improvements for Providers

Cost of Living Adjustment

During his Executive Budget address Mayor de Blasio announced a 2.5 percent cost of living income adjustment (COLA) for approximately 50,000 full-time employees of non-profits that contract with the city, as well as an increase of the minimum hourly wage for these employees to \$11.50. This workforce includes many of the women and men employed by the non-profits with which ACS contracts to provide services. We appreciate the Mayor's recognition of our partner agencies' frontline workforce in the city's budget and of the hard work they do every day on behalf of the youth and families our agency serves.

Procurement of New *EarlyLearn* Services

This past December, ACS issued an *EarlyLearn* RFP which sought qualified vendors to provide quality child care services to approximately 4,800 children within 39 zip codes throughout all five boroughs. The proposals were reviewed by individuals with experience in child care services, operations and finance, and on May 12th, 41 contractors were recommended for awards to provide services at 60 centers and in five Family Child Care Networks. Once they successfully complete the responsibility determination and contract registration process, we expect that new *EarlyLearn* services will begin on July 1. On May 18th ACS opened a procurement for 222 seats in five zip codes that were not awarded in the RFP. The deadline for proposals to be submitted via HHS Accelerator is June 8.

Improvements for Youth & Families

Employment

Research shows that early and meaningful exposure to career paths significantly increases the likelihood of high school graduation, improves future employment opportunities and increases earning potential. We know that access to employment and skills programs is often limited for less advantaged youth, especially youth in foster care. One of my first missions when I joined ACS was to identify opportunities for us to prepare and equip young people with the skills necessary to obtain and maintain professional careers. The goal is to both strengthen the skill set of young people in our care, and to build a skilled workforce of New York City youth from which all employers in the City can benefit.

Internships for Youth in Care

One of the ways in which ACS is preparing youth in care for careers is through our Summer College/Graduate Internship program. ACS created a roster of youth in care between the ages of 16 and 24 from which our hiring managers can interview and hire young people for available internships within the agency. In 2014, ACS hired 51 youth in care as a result of this targeted recruitment outreach and recruitment is underway for this summer's class of interns.

Pathways to Civil Service

As the largest local government in the United States, the City of New York offers a wide range of opportunities for job applicants with all kinds of interests and backgrounds. With the support of New Yorkers for Children, DCAS and Local 371, ACS is launching an employment program, Civil Service Pathways for Youth, which will offer youth transitioning from foster care an opportunity to prepare for civil service employment and self-sufficiency. The Program begins on July 6 and will allow 60 youth over the age of 17 to participate in workshops introducing them to civil service careers, mentorship and test preparation.

Center for Youth Employment

The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City has collaborated with City agencies, including ACS, and a host of private sector partners to launch the Center for Youth Employment which connects young New Yorkers ages 14-24 to summer jobs, mentorships, and internships in order to develop skills, connect them to supportive mentors, obtain guidance towards college and careers. One of the Center's immediate

goals for summer 2015 is to double the number of summer jobs for NYC's most vulnerable youth in foster care or shelters to 2,000.

Summer Youth Employment Program/DYFJ

ACS' commitment to connecting young people with quality summer employment experiences also includes justice-involved youth. Since 2013, both of our secure detention facilities – Crossroads in Brooklyn and Horizon in the Bronx – have hosted a Summer Youth Employment Program for youth detained. Youth are employed in various capacities within the detention center with our housekeeping, maintenance, food service, DOE and case management teams. Those youth who begin employment while detained and are released before the program ends are placed with employers in the community so that they can continue working. We are excited to continue SYEP at our secure facilities in this summer – a total of 35 young people will participate in the program and gain valuable experience as a member of the City's workforce.

College Access

Hilton/CUNY Start Grant

Creating positive educational outcomes for youth in foster care continues to be a priority for ACS. I'm very pleased to announce that the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation has provided a four-year, \$2.5 million grant to City University of New York's Start program. ACS and our foster care providers will partner with CUNY's Start Program to serve young people who are transitioning out of foster care and want to attend college. Under the grant, 325 transition-aged youth will have the opportunity to enter CUNY Start, where they will receive intensive preparation in academic reading/writing, math, and other skills necessary for college success. As they progress toward an Associate's

Degree, students will receive financial, academic, and personal supports, including career counseling, tutoring, tuition waivers, MetroCards, and textbook vouchers. In order to better serve our youth, CUNY will also provide specialized training for their student advisers to help them develop an understanding of the child welfare system and the unique needs of students in foster care.

State Budget

The City's commitment to the creation and development of academic opportunities for young people in foster care is also shared by our partners in New York State. The State's 2016 budget includes new funding to support a "Foster Youth College Success Initiative" which will fund SUNY, CUNY and other higher education institutions to provide supportive services for foster youth to apply for, enroll and succeed in college. Our provider partners, the Children's Aid Society and Good Shepherd Services, are participating in a steering committee that is working with the State Education Department to implement the college success initiative statewide.

Closing

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 afternoon. I welcome your comments and questions.