



**The New York City Council,
Committees on General Welfare and Higher Education
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“Oversight – Higher Education Opportunities for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care”

**Testimony by
New York City Administration for Children's Services
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Good afternoon Chair Levin, Chair Barron, and members of the Committees on General Welfare and Higher Education. I am Julie Farber, Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Family Permanency Services (FPS) within the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). With me today is Kathleen Hoskins, Assistant Commissioner, Office of Education Support and Policy Planning (OESPP). On behalf of ACS Commissioner David Hansell, thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon. ACS is pleased to share more information with the Council about our work to connect young people in foster care with higher education opportunities—work that is impacting the lives of New York City's young people and positioning the City as a national leader in this area. Education and workforce opportunities are a central component of ACS' Foster Care Strategic Blueprint. This plan identifies key priorities and strategies for improving case practice and results for children and families in the foster care system—from family reunification to kinship placement and adoption to supporting older youth, and we are tracking and reporting our results. As you may have seen, yesterday ACS released our Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Blueprint Status Report, which highlights the significant progress being made. As we continue to aggressively implement the Blueprint, the reforms are yielding promising results across the foster care system that I will discuss here, before drilling down to the educational and workforce readiness supports and resources that ACS offers for our older youth in care.

Improved Outcomes for Young People in Foster Care

ACS and the de Blasio Administration remain focused on improved outcomes for young people in foster care through significant programs and investments that are targeted to advance the goals outlined in the Blueprint. We thank the Council for its leadership and partnership in this effort and would like to acknowledge Chair Levin for his role in shaping the work of the Foster Care Task Force that Commissioner Hansell is chairing. The Task Force is currently producing a report for the

Council and the Mayor containing actionable recommendations, including to improve education and employment outcomes for young people in foster care, and we look forward to sharing these with you in the coming months. I would also like to acknowledge my team of dedicated child welfare professionals, our foster care agency partners, the advocacy community, and the young people themselves who are striving for success and whose voices are essential to these initiatives.

There are few responsibilities more important than caring for children who have faced the trauma of neglect or abuse and have been removed from their families. Our mission is to achieve the goals of safety, permanency and well-being for every child in foster care. This is why we have built a robust system that is data-driven and evidence-based with trauma-informed practices.

ACS continues to strengthen and support families and keep children with their families when safely possible. The population of children in foster care remains at a historic low, with 8,825 children in foster care as of September 2017. When children must be placed in foster care, ACS works closely with our foster care provider agencies to make sure that families receive targeted services and supports. As a result, the majority of children who enter foster care return home to their families. In FY 2017, more than 2,000 children were reunified. Additionally, the number of children exiting care through kinship guardianship (KinGAP) increased by 10.2 percent from 343 children in FY 2016 to 378 in FY 2017. The City also successfully advocated in support of state legislation that will increase the availability of KinGAP for children in foster care, and particularly older youth. Under the current law, kinship guardians were narrowly defined as related to a child by blood, marriage, or adoption, and guardians could only receive payments up to the child's 18th birthday if they were appointed prior to the child turning 16. Once the new law goes into effect, kinship guardianship assistance payments will be available to the guardians of all children up to age 21, regardless of the child's age when the guardianship was finalized. Additionally, the law expands the definition of potential guardians to include "fictive kin," which could include someone like a close

family friend. The new law will allow more children, including older youth, to achieve permanency while remaining connected to important people in their lives, and families will have access to more financial resources to care for children with KinGAP subsidies.

In FY 2017, 899 children were adopted. ACS is working with our foster care agencies and other stakeholders to reduce the time to adoption finalization by streamlining the various administrative processes required to complete an adoption. In FY 2018 and scaling up through FY 2020, ACS and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption have established an \$11 million partnership to expand the Wendy's Wonderful Kids child-focused adoption recruitment model to increase the number of older children, sibling groups, and children with special needs who exit foster care. This important partnership will help connect more children who have been considered "hard to place," to a forever family through adoption and KinGAP.

As we make solid progress toward our goal to connect children and youth to permanent, safe, and loving families, we appreciate the Committees' focus here today on the vulnerable population of older youth in care. While most children and youth in foster care return home, are adopted, or achieve permanency through kinship guardianship, every young person's situation includes its own unique circumstances and challenges, and some will ultimately transition out of foster care to independent living.

The proportion of youth in care age 16 and older with an APPLA¹ goal decreased by five percentage points from December 2016 to November 2017. These young people, who are sometimes described as "aging out of care," receive assistance with medical and mental health services, housing, and education and vocational opportunities so that they are connected to a vast array of resources and supports at ACS, the foster care agencies, and in their communities as they transition out of care. This network of supports includes the option to apply for an "exception to

¹ APPLA is a federally defined permanency goal that stands for Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement. See <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/foster-care/oppla-appla/>.

policy” to remain in care past the age of 21, when foster care in New York State legally ends, so that the young person continues to receive case planning services and ACS-funded housing until the young person achieves appropriate permanent housing and meets their individual service planning goals.

ACS has successful programs underway that help young people in foster care and who are transitioning out of foster care advance their education and career goals. I will now discuss how we are enlisting stakeholders early to plan for education success, offering innovative, targeted supports for young people in college, and building workforce readiness while creating pathways to employment.

Starting Early to Plan for Education Success

The ACS Office of Education Support and Policy Planning (OESPP) works to engage stakeholders early and throughout a child’s school career to plan for education success. The Office provides training, resources, and direct technical assistance to frontline casework staff, including staff at ACS’ contracted foster care provider agencies. OESPP’s work includes collaborating with the Department of Education, working with ACS and provider agency staff to promote school stability for children in foster care, and supporting the educational needs of all youth involved in child welfare services. Nationally, we know that youth in foster care have poorer educational outcomes than their peers. To tackle challenges for our City’s youth in care around attendance, school performance, high school graduation and college persistence, ACS is implementing a range of strategies including partnerships with the DOE, increasing education specialists and resources within the foster care system, and arming caregivers and young people with concrete information and resources.

In Fall 2017, ACS and DOE partnered to create the tiered response attendance monitoring program that enhances communication between DOE and ACS provider agencies when students reach a threshold level of absences. The protocol covers foster care youth in grades K-8 and allows for earlier and targeted intervention to address attendance issues that often start in lower grades and lead to chronic absenteeism in high school. In addition to the protocol, we have seen increased notifications to parents or caregivers and ACS when concerns arise regarding older children.

ACS launched a new program in Summer 2017 in partnership with First Star CUNY Staten Island that is designed to support a group of rising ninth grade students successfully through high school to college. The program's goal is to build academic and life skills through tutoring and professional mentoring to prepare young people in foster care for higher education. We enrolled 24 students into the First Star Academy, which extends through four years of high school with year-long monthly sessions and immersive summer residential on campus experiences. This summer, students improved in core subject areas like algebra and writing, and engaged in a variety of enriching activities on-campus and in the community.

To increase the involvement of parents and foster parents in students' education, ACS released, "A Foster Parent's Guide to Education," in Fall 2017 that details foster parents' responsibilities and students' rights regarding education, from birth to age 21. The Guide includes specific, actionable information to help foster parents work with the young person in their care, the agency, and the child's school to support the student's path to higher education. ACS will complete a companion database by Spring 2018 so that students and foster parents can search for educational support directly targeted to youth in care, as well as links to additional education resources in their communities.

In the last three years, our foster care provider agencies have increased access points to work with families by developing new education support offices with 135 staff across 27 agencies. ACS provides each agency with daily technical assistance, professional development, and data support.

ACS continues to track long-term outcomes for young people in foster care who go on to attend college. We are pleased to share that as of Fall 2017, approximately 355 youth are enrolled in two- and four-year college programs at CUNY, SUNY, and other private school and out-of-state-programs. This represents approximately 28 percent of total young people ages 18 and older who are receiving care or support from ACS.² Further, we have established partnerships to remove financial barriers so that young people in foster care can enter and persist in college. Through our data matches with CUNY, as well as coordination with the Higher Education Services Corporation and the NYS Office of Children and Families to complete a statewide match for Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) eligibility, we work to make sure that students are maximizing financial aid. Beyond traditional financial assistance, young people receiving ACS services can apply for the federally funded Education Training Voucher (ETV) program to receive up to \$5,000 per year until age 23 for items such as tuition, student fees, room and board, books, and supplies.

In Fall 2017, 379 current and former foster youth received ETV funds with assistance from ACS. Moreover, the non-profit agency New Yorkers for Children partners with ACS to provide educational support for young people in foster care, including college scholarships, need-based emergency funds, and a Back-to-School package with a laptop, MetroCard, and gift card for textbooks.

When a young person leaves foster care to attend college outside of the City, ACS provides College Room and Board payments, up to the amount of the monthly foster care subsidy, to offset costs, and in FY 2017, ACS provided 37 students over age 21 with financial support for dorm and

² This includes youth in foster care, as well as youth receiving College Room and Board or an ETP.

meal plan fees, or off-campus rent. Additionally, the program helps students who are away at college and return to the City on school breaks by offering a foster home to the student during those times when campus housing may be closed.

Fostering College Success Initiative

Building on our existing higher education supports, in FY 2017, ACS was extremely pleased to launch our Fostering College Success Initiative with two innovative programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs of students who remain in foster care while attending college. This initiative began with a baselined, multi-year investment from the City that builds up to \$2.7 million in FY 2019.

City University of New York (CUNY) Dorm Project

In partnership with CUNY and the New York Foundling, the CUNY Dorm Project supports ACS' goal to increase post-secondary enrollment and college graduation rates for young people in care. ACS conducts outreach with foster care agencies about the program, accepts applications, and enrolls foster youth who may be entering college for the first time or continuing their education. The first group of 50 foster youth who participated in the program were enrolled in academic programs at ten CUNY colleges across the city and were residing in the Queens College and College of Staten Island dormitories. In FY 2018, the residential component expanded to the City College of New York, the program doubled in size to almost 100 students, and it will continue to grow in FY 2019.

Currently, we are serving 93 young people with complete financial support, on-campus housing, and targeted wrap-around services. All students are matched with a CUNY program tailored to their individual needs and that specializes in supporting youth in foster care with academic advisement and social supports. For example, CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate

Programs (ASAP) is committed to graduating at least 50 percent of students within three years and has proven to be one of CUNY's most successful community college initiatives, with students in the program graduating at a rate more than double that of similarly situated students. We currently have 37 Dorm Project students enrolled in ASAP. Our partners from CUNY are here today and can describe more about ASAP as well as their other successful programs that support our young people in foster care.

Another key component of the Dorm Project is the provision of 24/7 wrap-around support to the students. ACS has partnered with The New York Foundling to deliver comprehensive support services to the students living on all 3 campuses. College Success Coaches reside onsite at the dorm locations and offer success-driven guidance geared to enhance each student's advocacy and agency skills. The Coaches work with students to navigate the complexities of being a college student. They also provide assistance with workforce readiness by connecting students to internship opportunities in collaboration with CUNY and professional mentorship opportunities with external partners, such as Goldman Sachs and Casey Family Programs. The New York Foundling is here today, and a current CUNY student will also be sharing more information with the Council about his college experience.

The Dorm Project is an innovative approach to promoting the well-being of young people in foster care by helping them become educationally competitive and ready for the workforce. Highlights from the first year include: students achieving A's and B's increased in both semesters with an increase of nine percent in Fall 2016 and 24 percent in Spring 2017; and increases in both GPA and credits earned from the fall to spring semesters. ACS is tracking retention as a key measure of whether a student will persist in and graduate from college. Overall, program retention into the third semester was much higher for students whose first time in any college coincided with their first semester in the Dorm Project; these students persisted at a rate of 82 percent. We look

forward to sharing the Project's continued accomplishments as more outcome measures become available.

Fostering College Success College Stipend Program

To provide further support for students, ACS rolled out the Fostering College Success College Stipend Program in FY 2017. This investment opens the door of opportunity for foster youth in college by offering a daily stipend that students can use for essentials like personal items, phone payments, transportation, clothing, food, and books that are not covered with financial aid or scholarship funding, and ACS has funded more than \$1.9 million as part of the City's baseline investment in Fostering College Success programs. With this critical financial assistance, students are able to further enrich their college experience by engaging in on-campus activities and study abroad travel. Additionally, students in the program gain financial literacy skills through tools designed to help them organize and track their spending.

Building Workforce Readiness and Creating Pathways to Employment

Our Office of Employment and Workforce Development Initiatives, established in 2016 as one of the priorities of our Foster Care Blueprint, oversees a range of programs that are producing results by helping youth developing workforce readiness and skills and prepare for employment.

In Spring 2016, ACS partnered with the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to launch the Young Adult Internship Program PLUS (YAIP+) program. This program is built on the existing YAIP model and is specifically designed to serve current and former foster youth as well as juvenile justice youth. Of the 100 current and former foster youth who have enrolled, 90 percent completed all program requirements. More than half (56 percent) completed their internships and were hired into permanent jobs, while an additional 30 percent of the program

participants continue to advance their educational goals. ACS and the foster care agencies also referred more than 750 youth to DYCD's Summer Youth Employment Program.

In addition to these activities, ACS continues to innovate with cutting edge models to enhance the outcomes for young people in our system. We are providing on-site technical assistance and capacity building to our foster care agencies and internships for youth through several new partnerships.

- Six foster care agencies are implementing the Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers (YA WORC) model, with intensive training and support from The Workplace Center at Columbia University. This program provides agency staff with training and hands-on technical assistance to conduct career planning, develop Career Club peer groups, utilize labor market employment strategies, and develop relationships with employers. To date, over 100 youth have been enrolled into the YA WORC initiative.
- ACS and The Pinkerton Foundation are partnering to coordinate a mentored internship program. The Foundation provided 8 foster care agencies with funding for dedicated staff and engaged professional development organizations to support agency leadership and internship coordinators as they help prepare foster youth to succeed in the workplace. The program goal is to place 200 young people in supported internships within agency departments, who will work closely with well-trained supervisors to develop their soft-skills and work readiness.

ACS is also a partner in two major initiatives that are launching now.

- In October, the Manhattan District Attorney announced a commitment of \$3.75 million to two agencies that work with foster youth, Graham Windham and The Door, to enhance and

expand innovative programs, including education and employment services, for youth transitioning out of foster care.³

- New Yorkers for Children (NYFC), ACS, and Youth Villages are partnering to implement YVLifeSet, a nationally recognized model to improve outcomes for older youth in care. NYFC applied on behalf of ACS and was awarded match funding to implement YVLifeSet in partnership with 2 foster care agencies over the next 3 years. This model will roll out to two pilot agencies starting in Spring 2018, and we look forward to sharing further details about this with the Council.

Closing

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss higher education opportunities for youth in our system, including those aging out of foster care. We are proud of the work we have done to create and sustain vital programs that support foster care youth in achieving their higher education and employment goals. We are pleased to partner with the City Council in our continuing efforts to improve the foster care experience of our City's youth so that each young person can successfully pursue a path of education, enrichment, and independence. We are happy to take your questions.

³ <http://manhattanda.org/press-release/da-vance-invests-375-million-support-youth-aging-out-foster-care>