



**The New York City Council,  
Committee on Juvenile Justice  
Committee on the Justice System  
April 18, 2018**

*“Oversight –NYC’s Preparedness to Raise the Age”*

**Testimony by  
New York City Administration for Children’s Services  
Felipe Franco, Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Youth and Family Justice**

Good afternoon Chair King, Chair Lancman, and members of the Committees on Juvenile Justice and the Justice System. I am Felipe Franco, Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) within the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). Raise the Age implementation is a multi-system, cross agency effort, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the many ways in which ACS and our City and State partners are working together to prepare for Raise the Age implementation.

ACS firmly believes that all of our youth belong in age and developmentally appropriate settings that are tailored to meet their specific needs and maximize their potential as productive adults. Raise the Age is an opportunity for us to strengthen our existing system and continue to improve our practice, support our staff and providers, and fortify safety across the entire continuum. We have been working diligently to further adapt our services and programming within our community based alternative, detention, and placement programs to meet the needs of an older youth population, and we look forward to working with our partners to expand our quality programming and services to 16 and 17 year olds. When possible, we will support youth and families through our network of community-based programs, such as alternatives to detention and placement, to keep youth accountable. We also plan to expand the use of evidence-based models and treatments within our detention and placement facilities that meet the developmental needs of older adolescents. Raise the Age is an opportunity to better serve all youth safely in the least restrictive settings, and it is our intention to do just that.

### **DYFJ Overview**

The Division of Youth and Family Justice oversees services and programs for youth at every stage of the juvenile justice process. Our continuum includes community-based preventive services for youth who are at risk of delinquency, as well as their families. In addition, we provide detention

services to youth who are arrested and awaiting court resolution. Since 2012 with the enactment of Close to Home, we have been providing rehabilitative residential services for all youth placed with New York City as adjudicated juvenile delinquents, as well as aftercare services upon their return to the community.

### **Community-Based Alternatives**

We are proud to say that fewer young people are being arrested and fewer young people are entering our juvenile justice system than ever before. Overall admissions to juvenile detention have decreased significantly year over year, dropping 32% from FY 2014 to FY 2017. We think this is attributable to smart policing, lower juvenile arrests across the City, and the intensive preventive services that ACS, the Department of Probation and our partners provide to help prevent young people from ever entering the system.

We know that the best way to intervene in the lives of young people is to treat the whole family. ACS' Family Assessment Program is available to families of youth up to 18 age to help youth avoid delinquency and involvement in the juvenile justice system by providing therapeutic services that address difficult teenage behaviors. ACS also runs the Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI), which is the largest alternative to placement program in the City. JJI serves youth who have been adjudicated in Family Court and provides intensive services to these youth to keep them in their communities and with their families. JJI helps parents develop skills to support their children, enforce limits, and steer them towards positive peers and activities.

With Raise the Age, we have embraced the opportunity to develop alternatives to detention and placement that are age appropriate and gender responsive to meet the needs of all youth in the juvenile justice system. As part of a citywide Programming and Diversion Work Group, ACS has

identified new practices and enhanced services that will better meet the unique needs of older youth. Research overwhelmingly shows that young people do better when they are able to remain at home with their families and with connections to their community. We are planning to expand our continuum of evidence based programs to include interventions that promote permanency for justice-involved youth without family resources. In a few months, we will be announcing our selection decisions for the Mentoring and Advocacy Program, a new community based program designed to support youth by providing them with mentors and advocates with a focus on school engagement, education and workforce assistance. And, although they make up a small percentage of our population, ACS has been working with the Vera Institute of Justice, partner agencies, national experts and advocates on a Girls Task Force to reduce girls' involvement in detention and placement.

### **Detention**

ACS provides secure and non-secure detention services for youth who have been arrested and are waiting for judges to hear their case in court. DYFJ currently operates two secure detention facilities—Crossroads in Brooklyn and Horizon in the Bronx—and oversees eight non-secure detention group homes across the City, operated by not-for-profit provider agencies. Secure detention has the most restrictive security features and is typically reserved for youth who pose the highest risk or have been accused of committing serious offenses.

The vast majority—as high as 90% of young people in the juvenile system, regardless of gender—have experienced some sort of trauma. To address this trauma, and to help youth develop the coping skills they need to safely manage their behavior, we have expanded psychological and psychiatric services in Detention in partnership with Bellevue Hospital.

Safety in our facilities is a top priority, and we have worked hard to create a system of care within our secure juvenile detention system that is grounded in best practice and designed to promote a safe, secure environment for youth and staff. Primary to safety in youth institutions is having a sufficient and skilled workforce able to respond to youth needs and create a predictable and safe environment. Our current staff does a great job of meeting youths' needs and guiding them to learn new behaviors, while maintaining structured and safe facilities. The work that our staff does on a daily basis contributes to the dramatic drops in detention admissions and juvenile crime that we continue to see across the City, and I would like to acknowledge them for the significant impact they have on the lives of young people and their families.

After finally receiving the State's draft Raise the Age regulations on staff education and experience requirements in December 2017, we at ACS embarked on the development of a new civil service title that will represent the professionalism and dedication of our staff. We continue to work with our City and labor partners to finalize an attractive title that will enable the City to recruit and retain the hundreds of staff we will need to meet the mandates of Raise the Age.

In the meantime, ACS has been working with local and national experts from the Missouri Youth Services Institute, Safe Crisis Management and NYU Bellevue to develop a system of care grounded in strategies that use a team approach so staff consistently work together with the same group of youth to reinforce positive behaviors and safety; employ a wide array of crisis prevention and de-escalation techniques to manage and redirect youth behavior; and teach both youth and staff trauma responsive skills to help youth regulate emotion and behavior.

#### The NYC Model

DYFJ utilizes the NYC Model within our secure detention system. Adapted from the nationally recognized Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) model, the NYC Model is a therapeutic approach for working with youth in the juvenile justice system. Facilitated small

group interactions and the promotion of healthy, productive relationships are at the core of this group process model. All of our incoming direct care staff receives a week-long training on this model as part of their pre-service training, and all current staff in both of our secure detention facilities have been extensively trained in this approach. In addition, a consultant is working in both facilities to support the team leaders and the staff to ensure fidelity to the model.

#### Safe Crisis Management

DYFJ has employed Safe Crisis Management (SCM) as our crisis intervention methodology since 2012. SCM is an evidence-based behavior management system that focuses on helping staff learn and understand youth development and behavior, as well as prevention and de-escalation strategies that can be used to safely influence a youth's behavior in lieu of or prior to the need for physical intervention. If physical intervention is warranted, SCM includes Emergency Safe Physical Interventions (ESPI's) which are appropriate for use with youth. Staff participate in four days of SCM training during their pre-service training and receive an annual two day SCM refresher, and quarterly, on-site training and consultation to improve staff practice. In addition, our training academy is providing on-site, monthly booster SCM workshops for staff in both facilities.

#### NYU/Bellevue:

Through our partnership with NYU/Bellevue all secure detention staff receive training in working effectively with traumatized youth and strategies for preventing or mitigating vicarious trauma. We are in now in the initial phase of implementing *Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education & Treatment* (TARGET). TARGET is a comprehensive trauma intervention specifically designed for use in juvenile justice settings. This effort is designed to increase staff's sense of safety and provide front-line staff with proven skills for managing the behavior of youth with trauma-related issues as well as their own work-related stress reactions.

## Close to Home

Close to Home is a juvenile justice reform that has allowed New York City youth who have been adjudicated juvenile delinquents to be placed in residential care with ACS near their home communities. Prior to this reform, NYC children were placed in large institution-like settings located upstate, hundreds of miles away from their families and home communities. Now, youth many of whom are 16 and older, can participate meaningfully in services and treatment while furthering their education with the NYC Department of Education in placement, allowing them to continue to accrue credits towards academic advancement.

### Residential Placement

Involvement with Close to Home includes both a stay in residential placement and a term of supervised aftercare as youth transition from placement back to their homes and communities. ACS currently partners with seven non-profit agencies to deliver strengths-based placement programs in 24 non-secure placement residences (NSP) located in and near New York City. All seven providers have experience in serving juvenile justice populations, and each program offers structured residential care in a small, supervised, and home-like environment. Limited Secure Placement (LSP), which opened in December 2015, currently has programs operating at four sites: one in the Bronx, two in Dobbs Ferry, and one in Queens.

As I noted earlier in my testimony, admissions to detention have decreased enormously over the last several years, and we have also successfully lowered the census of Close to Home residential placements by 20% from FY 2014 to FY 2017. Given the low census in Close to Home, we are working with our Close to Home placement providers to right-size existing capacity to absorb the youth that will enter the system under Raise the Age beginning October 1<sup>st</sup>. We are using this planning process as an opportunity to think more creatively and expansively about programming for older youth with an emphasis on vocational training, apprenticeships, and

employment programs. Further, we have instituted a number of enhancements to the Close to Home initiative that focus on improving youth monitoring and accountability, increasing inter-agency partnerships and significantly enhancing oversight of staff and providers.

ACS has built a robust quality assurance capacity to monitor outcomes from Close to Home including on-going reviews and assessments of provider performance. Since 2015, DYFJ has tripled the number of site inspections and unannounced safety and security checks of our Close to Home providers to ensure that conditions of care are in line with ACS requirements and that providers are resolving identified issues in a timely manner.

### Aftercare

Most of our young people return to their home communities on aftercare following their Close to Home residential placement. Families and youth receive intensive support and accountability from the assigned ACS worker and aftercare resources. Since Close to Home's initial launch, we have seen that the success of a young person's reintegration into the community rests largely on the strength of the aftercare supports they receive. With this in mind, we have initiated a set of enhancements to our aftercare program to improve outcomes for justice-involved youth and bolster public safety. Through these reforms, ACS will improve the transition from residential placement to aftercare, strengthen supervision to ensure that young people attend school and participate in other important programming, and follow up more aggressively in the rare instances where public safety issues arise.

### Closing

As you have heard today, extensive planning is underway across the City to implement the initial requirements of Raise the Age by October 1, 2018, and I thank you for the opportunity to discuss some of ACS's work in this significant undertaking. DYFJ endeavors to maintain our



transparent relationship with the City Council and we will continue to seek your guidance and support as we move ahead with our implementation efforts. Thank you again for your time. My colleagues and I are happy to take any questions.