

# TheChildren'sAgenda

Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees on the SFY2018 Executive Budget Human Services Budget Hearing  
February 7, 2017

Submitted in writing by Brigit Hurley, Policy Analyst, The Children's Agenda

The Children's Agenda (TCA) would like to thank the chairs and members of the respective human services committees for the opportunity to submit testimony on the SFY2018 New York State Executive Budget.

The Children's Agenda was created 12 years ago to improve the health, education and success of Monroe County's children and youth, especially the most vulnerable, through advocacy for evidence-based solutions and policy change at the local, state and federal levels. Through independent advocacy, we work to change the entire system of programs and services needed for all children, particularly our most vulnerable, over the long run.

We believe that Governor Cuomo's 2017-18 Executive Budget proposes several important investments to support New York's children and youth, including 22,000 new after-school slots, adoption of "Raise the Age" juvenile justice reform that will positively impact the 28,000 16- and 17-year old youth arrested annually, and expansion of community schools and PreK programs.

Yet, other key investments are missing: the budget proposes no new child care subsidies for low income working families, does not protect providers or parents from the cost of new federal child care regulations, and reduces funding for the Nurse-Family Partnership.

Adding to uncertainty in federal funding for children's services, the Executive Budget includes language allowing the Governor to reduce funding to localities if state revenue is less than expected.

**CHILD CARE IN THE EXECUTIVE BUDGET:** Current child care subsidy funding leaves 83% of eligible families unserved in New York. When eligible children go un-served, their development and their parents' employability are put at risk.

Despite these gaps, the Governor proposes no new funding for child care subsidies and reduces general fund support for child care. This general support is replaced via a requirement that counties use ~\$27M in Title XX dollars to fund child care. This funding is currently used flexibly by local districts for critical programming, including services to children in the foster care system. We oppose this because it pits one vital service against another, and would result in a net loss for local districts.

The Governor proposes an expansion of the child care tax credit for families earning \$50,000 - \$150,000, costing the state \$42M. Tax credits can be part of a comprehensive solution to address the needs of working parents who cannot afford child care, but are NOT and CANNOT be a substitute for a robust state funding plan that must include adequate subsidies for low income working parents who want to provide their children with quality early care and education. There are no funds for implementation of new federal regulations, leaving open the possibility that already-struggling parents and child care providers will have to cover these new costs.

## **TCA recommends:**

- To keep vulnerable children in care, we urge the State to invest an additional \$100M (over the current \$805.9M) to restore subsidies lost by escalating costs, and increase the number of children served. NY has reduced the no. of eligible children served, currently covering only 17%.

- To stabilize the system and to increase the percentage of eligible children being served by child care subsidies, we urge New York State to create an early childhood learning fund with a dedicated revenue stream.
- To protect parents and providers from additional costs, we urge New York State to allocate \$56M to implement critical but costly federal block grant requirements. NYS currently is under agreement to implement the first phases of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) regulations in 2017, including criminal background checks and new training requirements, at an estimated cost of \$56M.

**PRE-K IN THE EXECUTIVE BUDGET:** Access to a high-quality PreK experience increases a child's likelihood of reading at grade level by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and succeeding in high school and beyond. New York State has more than doubled its investment in PreK in recent years, through dollars targeted at full-day programs and 3-year-old Early PreK. The increase in slots is commendable; the complexities of the different funding streams has been a source of frustration for providers.

We are pleased that for SFY2018, the Executive Budget adds \$5M to expand PreK for 3- and 4-year-olds in high need areas and proposes the consolidation of NYS' 7 different PreK programs, beginning in FY2018 by merging the full-day and half-day PreK grant programs with the Universal PreK (UPK) program.

**TCA recommends:**

- Add \$150M (\$125M for programs for 3 and 4-year-olds in schools and community organizations and \$25M to promote infrastructure and support strategies) to increase access to quality PreK outside of NYC with priority to high needs districts and neighborhoods.
- Protect existing PreK services while creating a coherent and sustainable PreK system.

**HOME VISITING IN THE EXECUTIVE BUDGET:** Parenting support and education programs like the Nurse-Family Partnership and Parents as Teachers are a proven cost-effective investment of public and private dollars, leading to improved outcomes for both parents and children, and saving future expenditures on special education, mental health care, juvenile justice and public assistance.<sup>1</sup> Significantly for Monroe County, where child abuse and neglect reports are rising at an alarming rate and Child Protective Services staffing is inadequate, these programs have been proven to reduce rates of child abuse and neglect.

We are disappointed that the Governor proposes \$3M for Nurse-Family Partnership, \$500,000 less than FY2017.

**TCA recommends:**

Expand access, improve coordination and measurement across programs, and increase funding for evidence-based home visiting as follows: Allocate \$6M for Nurse-Family Partnership and \$1.4M for Parents as Teachers, and \$1.01M for Building Healthy Children via the Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS) program.

**RAISE THE AGE IN THE EXECUTIVE BUDGET:** New York State is currently one of only 2 states in the nation that treats 16- and 17-year olds as adults in the criminal justice system. A comprehensive Raise the Age policy would promote effective interventions and diversion programs that hold youth accountable for their actions while also ensuring pathways to productive citizenship.

Raise the Age will benefit our communities as well as our youth. A study comparing New York youth to young people in New Jersey – where 16- and 17-year olds are treated as juveniles instead of adults - found that among

youth who committed similar crimes, the New York youth were more likely to recidivate. New York youth had higher re-arrest rates, higher re-incarceration rates, and a shorter time period to re-arrest than their New Jersey peers.<sup>ii</sup> The approximately 800 inmates in New York's local jails and state prisons who are under 18 years of age are twice as likely to be physically harmed by other inmates and staff, five times more likely to be sexually assaulted, and eight times more likely to commit suicide.<sup>iii</sup>

For the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, the Executive Budget advances legislation to change New York's policy of treating 16- and 17-year-old youth as adults in the criminal justice system. In the 2017-18 bill, the age of juvenile jurisdiction would rise to age 17 in 2019 and to age 18 in 2020. \$110M capital funding is proposed.

**TCA recommends:**

Pass Raise the Age legislation with sufficient funding to provide for appropriate facilities, programs and services for 16- and 17-year old youth being moved out of the adult criminal justice system.

***EARLY INTERVENTION/PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE EXECUTIVE BUDGET:*** When children show developmental delays at a young age, interventions can prevent further delays and help children develop to their full potential. Services provided to infants, toddlers and preschoolers can decrease and at times eliminate the need for much more costly interventions in the K-12 system.

Many young children with special needs throughout New York State are delayed in receiving services when timeliness is crucial due to significant brain development happening. Lacking appropriate and timely services and Pre-K classroom environments, they enter the K-12 school system farther behind and in need of more special education services.

Parallel shortages exist in the Early Intervention program which serves infants and toddlers. Services are not available because counties and school districts have experienced increasing challenges finding qualified professionals due to low reimbursement rates.

Unfortunately, the Executive Budget does not address the provider shortage. Article VII legislation contains provisions designed to increase insurance reimbursement for EI services, saving the state \$4M in FY2018.

**TCA recommends:**

To address the critical provider shortage that prevents thousands of young children in need of services such as speech language services and occupational and physical therapy from developing to their full potential and entering kindergarten ready to learn:

- Increase reimbursement rates for EI and PSE professionals by at least 5%.
- Create loan forgiveness programs and reimburse providers for the high cost of credentialing exams.

***AFTER-SCHOOL IN THE EXECUTIVE BUDGET:*** A December 2015 report authored by The Children's Agenda<sup>iv</sup> found that:

- *14,076 children who could benefit from high-quality after-school care in Rochester are not currently accessing it.*
- *Research shows that participation in quality after-school and summer learning programs can result in higher academic achievement and improved social competencies.*

Despite the demonstrated value of out-of-school time opportunities for children, New York's Advantage After School Program has suffered from little to no expansion since 2008.

We are pleased that Governor Cuomo proposes a new Empire State After-School Program that will provide \$35M in grants to programs in Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative communities, expanding access for an estimated 22,000 children. Rochester is one of the 16 communities targeted to receive this support.

We do feel that it is important to continue funding for existing quality programs such as our Boys & Girls' Club and the Community Place of Greater Rochester, who are an integral part of our local youth development network. We are concerned that the Advantage Afterschool program is allocated \$17.3M, the same as the FY2017 Executive Budget but \$5M less than the enacted FY2017 budget.

**TCA recommends:**

Appropriate **\$32.8 million to the Advantage After School Program** by maintaining the current appropriation of \$22.3 million and investing an additional \$10.5 million.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the committee. For clarification or more information, please contact me at (585) 256-2620.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, <http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/>

<sup>2</sup> "Get the Facts", <http://raisetheagency.com/get-the-facts> and <http://raisetheagency.com/newitem/raise-age-campaign-responds-raise-age-budget-language>

<sup>3</sup> 2015 Opportunity Agenda, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/2015-opportunity-agenda-ensuring-justice-perception-and-reality-0>

<sup>4</sup> "Out of School Time Opportunities in Rochester", <http://thechildrensagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Out-of-School-Time-Full-Rpt-4.pdf>