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*...Because every child deserves a childhood.*

**NYS Public Hearing on the Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Minority Communities in Our State:  
Monday, May 18, 2020**

Good Morning, my name is Yvette Bairan. I am the Chief Executive Officer at Astor Services for Children & Families. I was raised in the Bronx, many of my family members live in the Bronx, so what happens there is very personal to me! In my role as CEO, I lead Astor in the administration and oversight of our children's mental health services, child welfare services, school-based and early childhood development programs for children and families in New York State's Mid-Hudson Valley Region and the Bronx. In addition, we work closely with community and other civic leaders, like yourselves, to ensure that Astor is seen as a premier resource for their constituents in need of these services. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before this legislative delegation.

Our services reach over 10,000 children plus their families annually. Since 1953, we have been serving the most vulnerable children in our communities. Many are Black and Latinos. These are children, adolescents and teens who struggle with emotional and psychological problems that make it difficult for them to experience the everyday pleasures of life; children at risk of placement in foster care; and families that need assistance in developing the skills necessary to raise their children in an environment filled with increasing challenges.

With this in mind, imagine the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to our already vulnerable population. Many of our families are now overwhelmed by increased financial, emotional and cultural challenges, more now than ever they need resources and support to give their children the healthy, happy childhood they deserve.

We know the impact firsthand. The majority of our clients in the Bronx reside in the areas with the highest infection and death rates. These are fueled by a large number of social determinants of health showing the inequities that currently exist in our State when it comes to income, access and availability of quality health services. I want to address the inequities in all of our systems and the convergence of them, including education. For example, distance learning for children who do not have Individual Educational Plans, is challenging enough -- imagine these children who have mental health issues and whose families may also be Spanish speaking. The fact that the behavioral and mental health services continue to be at the bottom of the agenda, is completely unacceptable, if we are going to meet the needs of these children and families.

Astor has been there for our current clients and has seen an increase in new ones. We have been on the forefront of providing tele-mental health services as well as in-person care management and prevention services when needed to ensure that our families know that they are not alone in these uncertain times. Since shifting the majority of our services to tele-mental health, which included enacting a hotline number for anyone needing our services, we have had 19,929 tele-mental health sessions and 514 new clients.

The disproportionality of race and income in the cases that we are seeing is hard to ignore. Although we have been successful in maintaining relationships with our clients and families throughout this time, we also see the increased need for mental health supports, such as tele-mental health, which has proven to help many already in communities of color. It will be a necessity for so many more children and families post-COVID-19 as they settle into a "new normal". We will continue to have the need in the regulatory flexibilities we have been provided as a result of this pandemic, on a permanent basis, but at a minimum for many years once we get back to that "new normal".

Astor is committed to carrying our communities through this tough time into a brighter tomorrow but we cannot do it alone.

We appreciate our partners in the Assembly and Senate and look forward to working with you to ensure that our vulnerable children and their families receive the services and support they need to be healthy!

I know, with your support, we can come out of this stronger and more united as a nation than ever before.

Thank you!