

**City Council Hearing on the Merger of New York City's Administration for
Children's Services and Department of Juvenile Justice**

Juvenile Justice and General Welfare Committees

Testimony by John B. Mattingly

November 12, 2010 at 10 am

Good morning Chair Gonzalez, Chair Palma and members of the Juvenile Justice and General Welfare Committees. I am John Mattingly, Commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS). Joining me today is Laurence Busching, Executive Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Youth and Family Justice. I would like to thank the committees for providing us with the opportunity today to discuss the merger of Children's Services and the Department of Juvenile Justice, and to reiterate our support for the merger legislation that was introduced by Chairs Gonzalez and Palma in April 2010, Intro 0195-2010.

Through this merger of ACS and DJJ, New York City has the unique opportunity to build upon our juvenile justice reform efforts to date and leverage our expertise in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems to strengthen outcomes for

court-involved youth. Our primary goals are to maintain public safety while reducing recidivism, and to provide the best care possible for court-involved youth while helping them to succeed in their education, personal lives and careers. Through the merger, the City also aims to reduce the use of detention by developing more family and community-based options aimed at strengthening family relationships and better addressing the behavior that leads to court involvement.

Since January, DJJ and ACS have been operating as two separate agencies under the leadership of Commissioner John Mattingly. In July, the administrative operations of these two agencies were integrated in order to create efficiencies and begin working toward a more aligned system. In order to fully bring the two agencies together we are relying on the City Council to pass legislation that will make DJJ a part of ACS under the City Charter and Administrative Code, and to integrate the agencies' budgets. We are eager to see this legislation enacted for several reasons:

First, there are a number of ways that the merger will help us to enhance the care provided to young people in detention, particularly for youth who are also involved with the child welfare system. More than 60 percent of young people admitted to

detention have had some contact with ACS. Experts in the field refer to these young people as crossover youth. By aligning the work of ACS and DJJ, we will be able to streamline casework and permanency planning for foster care youth in detention. We will also be better equipped to ensure that detention staff who work with youth served by ACS's child welfare programs know about the prior work with the family and the individual needs of the young person.

Second, there are several administrative efficiencies that will be achieved by the merger, including several that will help to streamline some of the most basic functions of operating detention. For example, the processes for purchasing clothing and food for youth in detention, and for standard repairs and maintenance of our facilities will be aligned with the overall ACS agency administrative processes. The merger will also facilitate efforts to synthesize detention administrative policies and procedures with those of ACS. For example, it will help us in our efforts to make our disciplinary system more uniform, timely and effective. The merger will also help us to ensure that the most effective financial systems are in place so that we are making the best use of our resources and ensuring timely payments to contractors. In sum, the merger will help us to make the operations of our detention sites more efficient and will remove unnecessary

obstacles to providing the high quality of care that we seek to provide in all of our facilities.

Since January, DJJ and ACS, together with our partners, have made significant progress in achieving our goals of reforming the use of detention, improving the quality of experiences for young people in detention, addressing the needs of youth and families involved in multiple service systems, and increasing information sharing and collaboration with stakeholders. We addressed our vision for these and other areas in the strategic plan that we released in June, and we have been updating the Council on our progress on an ongoing basis. In addition, we also have shared the City's detention reform action plan with the Council and with our stakeholders. The plan lays out a series of strategies for building on the City's successful efforts at detention reform over the past several years. These efforts have succeeded both in reducing detention usage and recidivism. In moving these efforts forward, the detention reform action plan lays out 8 specific strategies that will better target our use of secure detention, enhance our options for non-secure detention, coordinate our efforts on behalf of crossover youth, and maximize use of effective alternatives to detention. Many of these strategies are beginning to be implemented and others will be taking effect shortly. We believe that these strategies will enable us to close Bridges, our outdated facility in the Bronx. We

are well on our way to completing the necessary work in our other facilities to enable us to safely close Bridges and maintain sufficient capacity within Crossroads and Horizon for all youth remanded to secure detention. The closure will not only be better for the youth in care—it will also allow us to better use our staff in the other two, more modern facilities.

In carrying out these ambitious reforms, ACS will benefit from the leadership of our new Associate Commissioner for Detention in the Division of Youth and Family Justice, Mr. Oliver Pu-Folkes. In this role, he will be responsible for overall management and supervision of juvenile detention in New York City. Mr. Pu-Folkes brings a wealth of experience to the position. Most recently, he served as the First Deputy Sheriff and Assistant Commissioner within the Sherriff's Office at the Department of Finance. Previously, from 2002 to 2006, Mr. Pu-Folkes served the Department of Juvenile Justice as Assistant Commissioner of Operations and Detention. In this position, he oversaw the operations of secure detention. Among the key initiatives that were developed under Mr. Pu-Folkes' leadership were a resident behavior management program, known as ASPIRE, and the creation of special support dormitories to provide for youth with mental health needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we hope that through today's testimony, and our discussions in previous hearings, we have conveyed to the Council the promising work that has taken place since the announcement of the integration of ACS and DJJ. At the same time, the operational challenges of running two non-merged agencies are significant, and we are therefore eager to see the enactment of this merger legislation so that we can dedicate our full energy towards further improvements in the ways that we serve court involved youth and enhance public safety. We are grateful for the support and advocacy that Chair Gonzalez and Chair Palma have provided throughout this process and particularly for their introduction of the merger legislation.

In the months since the Mayor announced the merger, we have been maintaining open communication about our plans with juvenile justice and child welfare stakeholders. We established an advisory board of community leaders, advocates, service providers, labor, members of law enforcement, city agencies, and representatives of the judiciary. We have met with the Council and testified on a monthly basis. We have appeared in many public forums and lead tours of our facilities. We have posted our plans on our websites and incorporated feedback

throughout. In all these settings, we have received overwhelmingly positive feedback on our plans and support for the merger.

We are confident that the merger will allow us to leverage new and existing resources. This will better enable us to continue working with our partner agencies across the City and all our stakeholders to strengthen our system's capacity to assess risk and provide appropriate interventions for court-involved youth.

Together, we can maintain public safety while minimizing system involvement.

We can strengthen our youth and families through evidence-based, cost-effective alternatives to detention or quality residential care where appropriate. We hope that the Council will consider the progress that has been made and the tremendous amount of work that we have underway and support our continuing efforts by passing this legislation. We are pleased to now take your questions.