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ACS ANNOUNCES RECORD NUMBER OF CASES ENHANCED BY THE “INSTANT RESPONSE TEAM” IN ITS 20TH YEAR OF COMBINING CHILD WELFARE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ON HIGH-RISK CHILD ABUSE CASES

Nearly 5,800 cases last year – and 78,000 since 1998 – have been handled by teams of ACS workers, NYPD Officers & DA Offices to protect city’s most vulnerable children

Coordinated response ensures robust, timely investigations and reduces further trauma to children involved in investigations

NEW YORK, NY - Today, New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) Commissioner David A. Hansell announced that a record number of high-risk child abuse investigations have been handled by the agency’s Instant Response Team, a model that is marking its 20th year bringing together ACS workers, NYPD Detectives, and District Attorneys’ staff.

In 1998, the Instant Response Team was created to improve coordination between ACS and law enforcement in high-risk child abuse cases involving severe physical and sexual abuse. The coordinated response helps ensure robust, timely investigations in complex cases, and it also helps reduce further trauma to children involved in investigations by limiting the number of interviews and/or exams.

From July 1, 2017 through June 30th, 2018 (FY18) a total of 5792 cases were coordinated through the Instant Response Team Program, a 22% increase over the previous two years. Over the course of two decades, nearly 78,000 cases have been jointly investigated by ACS, NYPD and the five District Attorney (DA) offices via Instant Response.

Either ACS or NYPD can initiate an Instant Response Team investigation. Once they do, teams respond immediately to the scene or the Child Advocacy Center and begin gathering information and conducting interviews together. The Child Advocacy Center is a child friendly setting that includes on-site experts from various disciplines charged with investigating Child Abuse. In the past two years, ACS has reorganized the managerial structure to improve accountability and expanded staffing. The expansion of the Instant Response Team is part of a larger series of reforms instituted by Commissioner Hansell when he was appointed last year, including additional training for frontline workers,

expanded use of technology to help in investigations, and greater coordination with NYPD, the Department of Education, and the Department of Homeless Services to investigate possible cases of abuse and neglect and to help ensure that families get the services they need to raise safe, healthy children.

“There is nothing more important than protecting the city’s most vulnerable children, and the Instant Response Team helps us do just that,” **said Commissioner David A. Hansell.** “Making sure our investigations are timely and thorough is critical in assessing risk and moving swiftly and appropriately to protect children. A major part of this work is combining expertise in child protection with expertise in law enforcement investigative practices. For 20 years, the Instant Response Team model has demonstrated its ability to gather critical evidence of possible abuse as efficiently as possible, while minimizing trauma to vulnerable children.”

“We know how important a sensitive and immediate response is for children who have experienced violence or abuse. That is why in 1996 we established the Brooklyn Child Advocacy Center, the first fully co-located Child Advocacy Center (CAC) anywhere in the country,” **said Nancy Arnow, Safe Horizon’s Vice President, Child Advocacy and Mental Health Treatment Programs.** Today, we have a CAC in each borough of New York City. This model allows us to partner with ACS, the NYPD, DA’s Offices and Expert Medical Providers to provide expert and coordinated care to child victims. The ACS Instant Response Team has been instrumental to our CACs, ensuring a swift, comprehensive and coordinated response to the city’s most vulnerable children and families. We are so grateful to ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell and the Instant Response team for protecting at-risk children for the past 20 years.”

The Mission of the Instant Response Team is to improve coordination between ACS and law enforcement in order to enhance the protection of children in New York City. In cases involving severe abuse and severe maltreatment committed by a parent or guardian, personnel from ACS, the NYPD, and District Attorneys’ Offices in each borough work together on “Instant Response Teams” in order to accomplish two main objectives. First, the teams aim to protect children from abuse and maltreatment by ensuring that evidence is gathered in a timely, effective, and coordinated manner, thereby laying the foundation for necessary intervention, and, where appropriate, removing the alleged abuser instead of the children. Second, the teams aim to minimize trauma to the child or children during the investigation process by: reducing the need for repetitive interviewing by law enforcement, medical and social service staff, and by holding interviews and medical examinations in child-friendly surroundings, such as Child Advocacy Centers and special child abuse clinics when possible.

Each borough is assigned at least one Instant Response Team Coordinator, who is responsible for establishing whether a report of abuse or neglect fits the criteria for an instant response. The Coordinator initiates the partnership among ACS, NYPD and the District Attorney’s office, hospitals, Child Advocacy Centers. The Coordinator is the principal point of contact for all agencies involved. In Queens, there are 3 IRT

Coordinators; in Manhattan there are 2 IRT Coordinators; in Brooklyn there are 5 IRT Coordinators; on Staten Island there is 1 IRT Coordinator; in the Bronx there are 4 IRT Coordinators. There is also one IRT Coordinator that works with the ACS Office of Special Investigations as well as 7 IRT Coordinators that work at ACS Emergency Children's Services, a 24/7 investigative unit at ACS that operates on evenings and weekends.

"In order to truly address child abuse in New York, as well as the intergenerational trauma it causes, we must use all available resources in a coordinated effort to combat this problem. Thank you to Commissioner Hansell, ACS, the NYPD, and District Attorneys' Staff for taking the necessary steps to reinforce the Instant Response Team and protect vulnerable New Yorkers." **said Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi (A.D. 28), Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Services**

"We must treat high-risk child abuse investigations with the utmost care and give the children involved — who have already been unimaginably wronged — the necessary attention they deserve," **NYS Senator Persaud said.** "I commend the Instant Response Team for their increased efforts in protecting the city's most vulnerable kids so they may procure a better future."

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