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## **NYC ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES RELEASES KEY FINDINGS FROM GROUNDBREAKING SURVEY OF LGBTQAI+ YOUTH IN NEW YORK CITY FOSTER CARE**

*With More Than One-Third of the Teens in Foster Care Surveyed Identifying as LGBTQAI+, ACS Announces Multi-Pronged Action Plan to Strengthen Services & Support*

**NEW YORK, NY** – Today, the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) released key findings from a [new survey](#) about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, agender or asexual and intersex (LGBTQAI+) youth in New York City foster care aimed at learning more about the experiences of youth who identify as LGBTQAI+. In groundbreaking data that are significant for the child welfare field nationally, the survey found that more than one out of three youths, ages 13 to 20, in New York City foster care identify as LGBTQAI+ and that those youth are more frequently young people of color.

The findings are included in a new report released by ACS, which contracted with Theo Sandfort, PhD, professor of clinical sociomedical sciences in the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons, to conduct the first-ever survey on the proportion of youth in foster care in New York City. This work was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Redlich Horwitz Foundation, New Yorkers For Children and was supported by the New York City Unity Project and the First Lady of New York City.

As a national leader, ACS has long been committed to improving outcomes for LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care and commissioned this study to learn more about youth experiences in order to further strengthen the agency's work. Based on the survey's findings, ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell today announced a [new multi-pronged action plan](#) that will build upon its ongoing work to improve outcomes for LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care.

"This study provides new and powerful data on the representation of LGBTQAI+ young people in foster care, data which have not existed before. ACS is committed to creating a safe and affirming environment where all young people can thrive, no matter their sexual orientation or gender-identity and expression, and that's why the results of this groundbreaking survey are so important, **said ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell.** "We look forward to implementing our multi-pronged action plan, which will help us strengthen our policies and practices to improve the overall health and well-being of LGBTQAI+ youth in care. It is our hope that this work will serve as a national model for jurisdictions across the country so that all LGBTQAI+ youth in care get the services and support they need to succeed."

"The high proportion of LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care surprised me," **said Dr. Sandfort.** "Why LGBTQAI+ youth are overrepresented is unfortunately something that this study cannot tell us. The relatively lower well-being among LGBTQAI+ youth found in this study is something that we see in LGBTQAI+ youth in general. However, this lower well-being also seems to result from

more negative experiences that LGBTQAI+ youth have in foster care. It is important to further understand what the specific needs of LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care are and how they can best be addressed.”

“NYC is a leader in the fight for LGBTQAI+ equality and committed to ensuring that all our young people are safe, supported and healthy. Three years ago, we launched the NYC Unity Project to put the full force of government behind addressing the unique challenges that LGBTQAI+ young people experience in our city, deepen investments in key LGBTQAI+ resources and programs, and double down on our work to advance the progress we have made.” **said First Lady Chirlane McCray.** “This new data will provide more information for the City to work with as we navigate this period of unrest and tackle persistent inequity.”

“We are proud to partner on this groundbreaking survey and eager to work with ACS, our city agencies, and our community partners citywide to move forward this vital action plan,” **said Ashe McGovern, Executive Director of the NYC Unity Project and Senior Policy Advisor for LGBTQ Initiatives in the Office of the Mayor.** “The NYC Unity Project was founded to push forward a coordinated government and community approach to tackling the needs of our most vulnerable LGBTQAI+ communities and, with this data in hand, we are more prepared than ever to create meaningful solutions to the challenges faced by our LGBTQAI+ young people in foster care.”

“We applaud NYC-ACS as a national leader in addressing the needs of LGBTQAI+ youth. These research findings show that LGBTQAI+ youth of color are overrepresented in foster care, which means systems must build equity into their solutions and share power with young people to design new approaches to get better, equitable results,” **said Sandra Gasca-Gonzalez, vice president for the Center for Systems Innovation at the Casey Foundation.** “Most importantly, child welfare systems must support families and adults to actively eliminate the bias, stigma and discrimination that LGBTQAI+ young people face not just in child welfare, but in society.”

“This research reaffirms that we must do even better to serve LGBTQAI+ youth and their parents so that young people can remain at home with their families and prevent the need for out of home care,” **said Sarah Chiles, executive director of the Redlich Horwitz Foundation.** “We are grateful to ACS for its deep commitment to equity and look forward to ongoing partnership to better meet the needs of LGBTQAI+ children and their families.”

“New Yorkers For Children is grateful to ACS, Dr. Sandfort, and all of the dedicated partners on this project for standing up this trailblazing study that helps to shed light on the unique needs of LGBTQAI+ Youth in the foster care system. Kudos to ACS for its swift response to the findings and for developing a multi-pronged action plan that will ensure more youth identifying as LGBTQAI+ have the support they need”, **says Saroya Friedman-Gonzalez, Executive Director, New Yorkers For Children.**

ACS is committed to providing high quality services and improving outcomes for LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care. Specifically, ACS has a dedicated LGBTQ Equity Strategies Director who is responsible for policy, best practices and guidance for serving LGBTQAI+ children, youth and families engaged with ACS. The LGBTQ Equity Strategies Office helps ensure that the agency treats all youth and families equitably and with empathy regardless of sexual orientation or gender expression. In 2012, ACS adopted a LGBTQAI+ youth and families in care policy that requires LGBTQAI+ youth have access to gender appropriate bedrooms, bathrooms, grooming and hygiene products. Additionally, contracted foster care provider agencies must recruit and

support foster homes that are LGBTQAI+ affirming. Youth are also entitled to health care that Medicaid will not pay for that includes hormone therapy and gender affirming surgeries. ACS also provides staff and contracted provider staff with LGBTQAI+ specific trainings.

Based on this steadfast commitment, and with generous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Redlich Horwitz Foundation and New Yorkers For Children, ACS commissioned this survey in order to better understand the needs of LGBTQAI+ youth and develop action steps to address those needs.

A total of 659 young people in foster care participated in the survey. The survey questionnaire included questions about the sexual and gender status, demographic characteristics, characteristics of the youth's placement in foster care, the youth's social connections, and their well-being.

Key findings from the survey suggest:

1. LGBTQAI+ youth are overrepresented in foster care. More than one out of three youths (34.1%), ages 13-20, in New York City foster care is LGBTQAI+. This is substantially higher than the proportion of LGBTQAI+ youth in the general population.
2. LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care are more frequently youth of color. With almost three quarters of the sample identifying as African American and almost a third identifying as Latinx, the sample reflects the population of New York City youth in foster care, in which people of color are disproportionately represented. Within this already racially and ethnically disproportionate group, LGBTQAI+ youth are less likely to be white and more likely to be Latinx.
3. The placements of LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care differ from those of non-LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care.
4. The family experiences of LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care can be challenging.
5. LGBTQAI+ young people have higher risk factors and more struggles with systems.

As a result of the survey's findings, ACS Commissioner Hansell today announced a new multi-pronged action plan that builds upon the agency's ongoing work to improve outcomes for LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care. This includes taking steps to reduce racial disproportionality in foster care. These efforts are intended to limit system-involvement for all youth of color, including LGBTQAI+ youth.

**The following ACS action plan was informed by the findings of the survey:**

1. **ACS will broadly share the survey findings and leverage this research to inform stakeholders of LGBTQAI+ youth experiences and make systemic changes.**
2. **ACS will form a dedicated LGBTQAI+ Committee as part of the ACS Youth Leadership Council.** This group of youth in care will act as representatives for other LGBTQAI+ youth in ACS care as it relates to policies and practices. The Council will meet with ACS staff to discuss emerging needs.
3. **ACS will work with foster care providers to expand recruitment targeting foster parents who would be interested in fostering the LGBTQAI+ youth population and to expand foster parent training for serving these young people.** ACS will utilize best practices for recruitment, training and support, and establish and track measurable goals for placing LGBTQAI+ youth with affirming foster families. ACS will work with Planned Parenthood of New York to create and implement a relevant and engaging

training program for foster parents to help them gain supportive knowledge, attitudes, and skills that will allow them to build affirming spaces for the LGBTQAI+ youth in their care.

4. **ACS is updating the current LGBTQAI+ Youth in Care Policy.** The Office of Equity Strategies is working with ACS staff, provider agencies, stakeholders, advocates, and youth to ensure the newest version is comprehensive, data informed, intersectional in its lens, and culturally responsive to the needs of youth.
5. **ACS is revising and strengthening staff training on LGBTQAI+ issues.**
6. **ACS is increasing services and supports for LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care.** ACS recognizes that additional targeted therapeutic capacity is needed to build higher levels of support for youth and families. ACS plans to increase its support with more robust therapeutic services for foster parents/kinship caregivers by expanding work with the Ackerman Institute. Youth, parents, kinship caretakers (relatives and family friends), and foster parents referred for family therapy will also have access to other services that Ackerman's Gender Family Project (GFP) offers, including support groups for the whole family. GFP has offered virtual groups during the COVID-19 pandemic with separate spaces for youth and caregivers to gather with peers as they navigate the challenges of moving through a cis-normative culture. GFP will also offer an additional group available only to foster care parents so that their unique concerns can be addressed in a communal setting. ACS is also expanding training services for foster parents.
7. **ACS will be conducting further studies moving forward,** including adding questions pertaining to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) to its annual Youth Experience Survey and conducting a needs assessment for LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care that will measure and quantify specific needs, gaps, and resources needed to ensure LGBTQAI+ youth in the ACS systems have better outcomes in placement(s) and in aftercare
8. **ACS will advocate for, support and protect the implementation of LGBTQAI+ affirming policies and practices.** ACS will create opportunities to share its experiences and practice with other local jurisdictions. ACS will also collaborate with national advocacy organizations to protect and affirm LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care.

[Click here](#) to read the full survey.

[Click here](#) to read the ACS Action Plan.

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