



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 13, 2021

Contact: mediainquiry@acs.nyc.gov

**NEW STUDY FROM NYC ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN’S SERVICES SHOWS HOW
“PARENT ADVOCACY INITIATIVE” HAS IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND
FAMILIES**

When Parent Advocates with Lived Experience in the Child Welfare System Supported Parents in Child Safety Conferences, ACS Saw Improvements in Well-being Outcomes for Children

NEW YORK, NY – Today, the NYC Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) announced key findings from a new study that suggests that the Parent Advocacy Initiative in initial child safety conferences is helping to improve outcomes for children and families. Utilizing this research, ACS has released a concept paper to seek feedback in preparation for the upcoming Parent Advocate Request for Proposals (RFP) to operate Parent Advocacy programs. The concept paper lays out a vision to build on the current model and scale enhancements that were found to improve outcomes, including expanded Parent Advocate involvement and support, family-driven service plans, and strengthened linkages between Parent Advocates in different ACS program areas.

The Parent Advocacy Initiative is a peer support program in which parents with prior experience in the child welfare system offer advocacy and support to parents currently involved in the child welfare system. In New York City, Parent Advocates participate in Initial Child Safety Conferences, meetings in which family members and child protective specialists (CPS) at ACS discuss safety concerns in the home and identify the best safety plan for the child. The recently published study revealed that, with the Parent Advocacy Initiative in place, ACS saw a significant increase in the conference attendance by parents in comparison with the past; a reduction in child removals; and an increased use of kinship care for children who had to be removed due to safety concerns.

“We are excited by the results of this new study, which reinforce our belief that having Parent Advocates providing support to parents as we work to assure child safety can be of significant benefit to children and families. Parent Advocates have walked in the shoes of those currently involved in the child welfare system, and their lived experience can help empower and better engage parents during one of the most challenging times of their lives. We will continue to elevate the voices of parents and incorporate Parent Advocates into all parts of our agency, because we are confident that it will result in better outcomes for children and families in New York City,” **said ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell.**

“Parent Advocates possess a unique ability to understand the perspectives of parents and offer supports, promote family engagement in case decision-making, and encourage participation in services. Parent advocacy and support programs have been gaining attention in child welfare, and the growing body of empirical evidence on such programs have demonstrated that the inclusion of a Parent Advocate enhances the family-centered practice and has the potential to improve outcomes for children and families while giving voice to parents and communities most

impacted by the system,” **said Dr. Marina Lalayants of the Silberman School of Social Work, Hunter College, The City University of New York.**

“Parent Advocates are not only trained in child welfare policy, but they have previous experience navigating the child welfare system, and so the support and expertise they offer to the families we work with is invaluable. As this study suggests, the Parent Advocacy Initiative is having a positive impact on children and families and truly represents a culture shift within the New York City child welfare system. I look forward to its continued success,” **said Sabra Jackson, Parent Engagement Specialist at ACS.**

The Parent Advocacy Initiative in Initial Child Safety Conferences is a type of peer/parent support program that became operational in New York City in December 2013. ACS works with non-profit organizations to recruit, train and employ these parent advocates across all boroughs.

Parent Advocates offer services such as support to parents in preparation for and during the child safety conference by helping them to be informed about their rights and responsibilities within the child welfare system, gain awareness of the child welfare concerns and understand and navigate the child welfare system. This initiative builds upon the work happening at ACS to address racial disproportionality across the child welfare system. ACS has prioritized initiatives that help strengthen parents’ voice and success and is currently implementing its Equity Action Plan, which is designed to address racial disparities across the child welfare system.

A recently published study in the *Children and Youth Services Review* titled, “Outcomes of the Parent Advocacy Initiative in Child Safety Conferences: Placement and Repeat Maltreatment,” examined the impact of the child safety conferences on case outcomes of families served by parent advocates. Specifically, the study researched cases receiving Parent Advocate intervention over a period of the 2016 calendar year and compared it to pre-intervention cases from the 2013 calendar year and cases from the 2016 calendar year that did not receive the parent advocate intervention. The study results revealed a significant increase in the conference attendance by parents in comparison with the past. Furthermore, the results of the study revealed that the Parent Advocacy Initiative contributed to the reduction of child removals, as a result, more children remained at home with parents. For children who had to be removed due to safety concerns, the study results also showed an increased use of kinship care, or children being placed with relatives and close friends as opposed to non-relative foster parents. Finally, the rates of indicated repeat maltreatment remained unchanged, suggesting that the initiative did not result in compromised child safety.

The Parent Advocate Initiative at Initial Child Safety Conferences builds on the agency’s continued work to incorporate Parent Advocates into decision making processes across the child welfare system. Last year, ACS announced the “Parents Supporting Parents” initiative which provides Parent Advocates to support, inform and mentor parents with children currently in foster care. ACS aims to scale this approach across the foster care system so that every parent with a goal of reunifying with their child has an assigned parent advocate, in order to increase safe and timely reunification of families with children in foster care. ACS will continue to identify new ways to incorporate Parent Advocates across all of its programs.

To read the study, please click [here](#).

To read the concept paper, [click here](#). Comments are due by December 3 at 5pm and can be submitted to ParentAdvocateOOA-CP@acs.nyc.gov.

###