



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES DOUBLES NUMBER OF 'CARES' UNITS
IN JUST TWO YEARS**

CARES is an Alternative Child Protection Approach That Works Hand-in-Hand With Families to Empower and Provide Support Without the Need for a Traditional Investigation Or Court Involvement

Expansion Means More Support for Families & a Reduction in Unnecessary Child Welfare Investigations in NYC

Today, NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) Commissioner Jess Dannhauser announced that, in just two years, the agency has more than doubled the number of CARES units from 31 to 64. CARES, which is an alternative response framework, stands for 'Collaborative Assessment, Response, Engagement & Support.' The name, CARES, was suggested by a local father in 2020 who had previous experience with the alternative response.

CARES is an approach when there is no immediate or impending danger to children and where there are no allegations of serious abuse, ACS diverts the case to this non-investigative child protection response. Without launching a traditional investigation, the CARES program focuses on engaging families in supportive services that meet their needs and their ability to care for their children. Expansion of CARES is a core strategy for combatting racial disparities in the child welfare system and reducing unnecessary child welfare investigations in New York City. ACS now directs 25% of incoming child protection cases to CARES.

"ACS is committed to addressing the racial disparities that exist in the child welfare system and reducing the number of families experiencing a child welfare investigation where unnecessary, and the expansion of CARES is a critical component of this work," **said Commissioner Dannhauser.** "I am pleased that we have not just expanded CARES but more than doubled the number of CARES units across New York City. Currently, 25 percent of incoming child protection cases are diverted to CARES, which means more support for families and a reduction in unnecessary child welfare investigations."

Poverty, oppression and racial inequity are often factors that lead to reports to the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR). These families, of which the overwhelmingly majority are Black and Latinx, typically become known to the child welfare system not because their children are at imminent risk but because they need access to critical resources, like food, clothing and mental health counseling and more. To help reduce racial disproportionality among the families that come to the attention of the child welfare system, ACS has been working hard to remind New Yorkers that families can receive services and supports without the need to make a report to the SCR. For instance, New Yorkers can:

- Contact the ACS prevention support line: 212-676-7667 (Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) or connect@acs.nyc.gov to request support.

- Visit nyc.gov/ForFamilies to access free community-based programs.
- Visit MyCity.nyc.gov to access child care assistance.
- Contact OCFS's new HEARS family line (Help, Empower, Advocate, Reassure and Support): 1-888-55HEARS (Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.).

ACS is required by law to respond to every allegation of child abuse or neglect that is referred to the agency by the SCR. Child Protective Specialists at ACS gather facts, assess child safety, and work with families to find out what they may need to keep children safe. Child protective investigations last up to 60 days and, at the end of the investigation, a determination is made of whether the report is "indicated" (credible evidence of abuse or neglect exists) or "unfounded" (no credible evidence of abuse or neglect exists). Throughout the investigation, ACS helps provide families with what they need to keep children safe at home, including referrals for prevention services such as: counseling, drug treatment, mental health services, and concrete supports to meet housing, child care, or other basic needs. Alternatively, when Child Protective Specialists see that there is no immediate danger to children and no allegations of serious child abuse, families may be referred to a CARES unit.

Without launching a traditional investigation, the CARES units focus on engaging families in supportive services that meet their needs and their ability to care for their children. In CARES, specially trained child protective staff partner with the family to identify their needs, educate the family, empower the family to make decisions that address their needs and the needs of their children, and connect families to appropriate services. The CARES approach is family-centered, family-driven, and solution-focused.

Over the past two years, the number of CARES units has increased from 4 units to 8 units currently in Bronx North; 4 units to 8 units in Bronx South; 6 units to 12 units in Brooklyn East; 6 units to 12 units in Brooklyn West; 6 units to 12 units in Queens' 3 units to 8 units in Manhattan; and 2 units to 4 units on Staten Island.