



**The New York City Council,
Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare
Monday, February 25, 2013**

“Int. No. 866-a: Reporting Data Related to Sexually Exploited Youth”

Testimony by

**Ronald E. Richter, Commissioner
New York City Administration for Children's Services**

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Good morning. I am Ronald E. Richter, Commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS). With me today is Susan Morley, ACS' Senior Advisor for Investigations. Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to address the proposed legislation related to reporting data on sexually exploited youth.

Before we discuss the legislation, I would like share the work that ACS has done over the past several years, since the passage of the Safe Harbor Act in 2008, to address the needs of sexually exploited youth. We have undertaken this work on a number of fronts through our child protective, preventive, foster care, and juvenile justice programs in order to identify youth who may be or have been sexually exploited as well as to train staff and establish services that can address the needs of these youth.

As the Council is also aware, New York City was recently allocated \$622,000 in state funding to address the needs of this population. We have collaborated extensively with DYCD, and have reached out to providers and advocates who are engaged in this work to get their input. Earlier this month we developed and submitted a plan outlining the city's use of these funds to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). We are very pleased to report that just last week the plan was approved by the state and we are happy to share the details of it this morning.

Meeting the Needs of Sexually Exploited Children

ACS offers supportive services, as well as placement options and programs that are designed to address the special needs of this population. Young people come into contact with Children's Services

for many reasons, including but not limited to domestic violence, substance abuse, behavioral issues and/or mental health issues. Any number of these issues can mask sexual exploitation. In addition, youth come into contact with ACS through a number of doors: we see children in the course of our Child Protective Investigations, at our Children's Center (which, as many of you know, is our facility that cares for children who are in our custody awaiting foster care placements), in our contracted foster care and preventive programs, and in our juvenile justice programs and facilities. In the past several years, ACS has established processes to help identify and address instances of sexual exploitation, whether they are identified during the course of a child protective investigation, when a child is arrested, is being served through our Children's Center, is in foster care, or is engaged with our preventive service providers.

Investigative/Clinical Work

In recent years, ACS has invested in strengthening both our investigative capacity and our clinical expertise in order to better assess these issues. In 2006, ACS hired its first team of Investigative Consultants, retired law enforcement investigators led by Susan Morley, who is a former Commanding Officer of the NYPD Special Victims Division. We now have 108 Investigative Consultants with extensive law enforcement experience. Any case involving suspected sexual exploitation triggers an immediate alert to our Investigative Consultants. In addition, each of our borough Child Protective offices has a team of clinical social work staff who have expertise in issues of violence and trauma that we see in cases involving sexually exploited youth.

Specialized Contracted Providers

ACS contracts with providers to offer both placement options for sexually exploited children as well as supportive service options designed to address the special needs of this population. We contract with preventive, foster care, and residential providers that work with this population. Since 2009, the Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA) has operated a residential program called Gateways that provides intensive, specialized care for girls ages 12 to 16 who have been victims of commercial sexual

exploitation and trafficking. This program houses twelve youth and remains at or near full capacity at all times.

ACS also contracts with JCCA for a Specialized Family Foster Care program that places sexually exploited youth with foster parents who are trained to offer a therapeutic home environments while the young person receives a full range of medical, emotional and psychological services to address their needs. The foster care program is currently being developed and expects to serve 24 youth once it is fully operational.

In addition, JCCA runs a residential program to support sexually exploited young women who are in the juvenile justice non-secure placement system. JCCA currently supports these youth using two models (Sanctuary and Gateways), and a four phase model of treatment that involves assessment, individual and family therapy, and peer counseling. The JCCA non-secure placement residence can accommodate six youth.

ACS also contracts with the New Beginnings program at St. Luke's--Roosevelt Hospital Center. Their Community Services for Children & Families is a clinical program intended to maintain sexually exploited youth safely in their homes by providing intensive therapy to the youth and family members. In 2012, St. Luke's Sexually Exploited Preventive Services program served 38 families.

Finally, ACS has a long-standing partnership with GEMS, a nationally recognized organization that works with sexually exploited youth through intervention and outreach, direct supportive services, training, and technical assistance. GEMS has been invaluable to us at the Children's Center. It is critical that we comprehensively assess children at the Children's Center which is often our first point of contact with them. GEMS has worked closely with our staff to provide training on how to identify and assess risk factors for sexual exploitation.

Training

Another critical component of our work with this population involves training staff in several of our divisions to be able to identify and assist sexually exploited youth. In May 2012, ACS, in

collaboration with Safe Horizon's anti-trafficking unit, the Manhattan and Brooklyn Assistant District Attorneys, the NYPD Vice Enforcement Coordinator, End Prostitution and Child Trafficking (ECPACT-USA), and St. Luke's New Beginnings Program held an all-day training for ACS employees in our Division of Child Protection to discuss human trafficking and discuss how to define, identify, understand, and engage sex trafficked youth. The discussion included information regarding identifying red flags for human trafficking. A total of 411 staffers, including participants at all levels within DCP, and other ACS divisions, attended this training. This forum was also broadcasted live to all the Borough Office Sites for viewing by staff.

Subsequently, ACS released a policy in June 2012 regarding the Assessment and Safety Planning for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children. The policy provided guidance to ACS staff on how to identify, engage, support and develop safety plans with children who are victims of sex trafficking. The policy – as well as a Desk Aid Guide produced for CPS staff - directs staff to identify, work with parents and care takers, when applicable, and find targeted services to help children recover from sex trafficking. Since the May training, ACS has conducted additional trainings with child protective offices in each borough in which a total of 275 frontline line staffers have participated.

Foster Care instead of Juvenile Justice Placements

As the Council is aware, the Safe Harbor legislation allows for the conversion of Family Court delinquency cases of youth under the age of 16 who are arrested for prostitution to a Person in Need of Supervision (PINS) petition. Conversion to a PINS petition prevents the young victim of sexual exploitation from being prosecuted for prostitution and allows that young person to receive critical support and services. In 2010, ACS, with assistance from the Mayor's Office, began to coordinate with other New York City agencies including the Department of Youth and Child Development (DYCD), the Law Department, the Department of Probation, and the New York Police Department (NYPD) to implement the Act's provisions and to develop a protocol for ensuring that sexually exploited youth receive necessary services. That protocol included a role for each agency: the Law Department assists

with the PINS conversion process, ACS places children in the appropriate level of care and secures services for them, and DYCD establishes drop-in centers to serve impacted youth.

City-Wide Coordination

In addition to the work we are doing here at ACS, stakeholders citywide are collaborating to address the needs of sexually exploited youth. In 2006, Mayor Bloomberg established the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force, chaired by Deputy Mayor Carol Robles-Roman to coordinate efforts to combat foreign and domestic human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Task Force, of which I am a member, meets quarterly and brings together experts from state and federal law enforcement, city and state government agencies, service providers, advocacy groups, and other community-based organizations. In addition, ACS co-chaired a workgroup with the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) to assist provider agencies in becoming more informed on this issue. This work led to a round table discussion with experts on sexual exploitation that included the FBI, the District Attorney's office and providers with expertise in this area.

ACS/DYCD Plan to Use State Safe Harbor Funds

As I mentioned earlier, last fall New York State's Office of Children and Family Services allocated \$622,200 in funding to New York City to address the needs of sexually exploited children through the development and implementation of a statewide child welfare response to child trafficking. Through extensive interagency collaboration with DYCD, and an informal survey with a variety of stakeholders, providers, and advocates, ACS received valuable input on the need for expanded services. We also held a public hearing last week to allow for additional feedback.

I would like to take a few minutes to walk you through our plan, which was approved last week and we will begin to implement immediately. The plan includes eight primary components. **First**, DYCD has a street outreach team that seeks out youth in areas where they tend to congregate at night (including public spaces, subway stations, transportation hubs, and other areas). The workers provide information

about services for vulnerable youth and transports them to a safe environment - be it their home, another safe environment, or a Crisis Shelter. With these additional funds, we will increase the program's capacity to identify and engage youth at risk of sexual exploitation who may be AWOL from foster care placements. In addition, we will create and implement training and tracking mechanisms around engaging sexually exploited youth and encourage them to return to their foster homes. To improve information sharing, street outreach teams will communicate regularly with our Children's Center and with Children's Services AWOL Unit, which assists provider agencies with identifying and re-engaging youth who have run away from foster care placements. Current street outreach units serve approximately 480 youth per month. Children's Services projects this additional street outreach will serve approximately 4,300 more children at high risk of sexual exploitation.

Second, we plan to place Master's in Social Work counselors from agencies that contract with DYCD and have experience in providing services to sexually exploited youth at ACS' Children's Center to engage youth and prevent AWOLS. Provider agency staff will also train and consult with Children's Services staff to build our capacity to identify and engage these youth and appropriately direct them to the existing services I have discussed. Provider agency staff will work at the Children's Center during times when youth are at higher risk of leaving the facility such as evenings and weekends for up to 60 hours per week. We expect this combination of capacity building and direct services to improve service delivery to all high-risk youth, ages 11 and older, entering the Children's Center, which sees approximately 8,000 youth per year.

Third, as the Youth Services committee is already aware, DYCD runs a Summer Youth Employment Program which provides New York City youth between the ages of 14 and 24 with summer employment and educational experiences. We plan to use a portion of the State Safe Harbor funds to increase the capacity of this program. DYCD will set aside forty Summer Youth Employment slots to specifically serve foster care youth who are placed in a specialized sexually exploited foster care placement or at the Children's Center, by providing them with opportunities so that they can become

familiar with the world of work, gain employment experience, and identify educational pathways that support career and life goals.

Fourth, it is critical that we identify youth at risk of exploitation as early as possible, and connect them to the specialized preventive, foster care and juvenile justice services that we offer. We will use a portion of the funds to build the capacity of ACS staff and service providers in identification and engagement by developing Program Champions within key areas of Children's Services. These Program Champions will be a resource and liaison for all issues related to sexual exploitation within child protection, foster care, and preventive program areas with an increased focus within the Education, AWOL, and Older Youth Services units. Children's Services will release a Request for Proposals to engage a provider experienced on the issue of child sexual exploitation who can work with designated staff to design a curriculum that will be shared with other city agencies serving similar populations.

Fifth, we are using funds to specifically target our Division of Youth and Family Justice. We will hire an expert in this area to train Case Managers, Placement and Permanency Specialists, and Youth Counselors to identify, understand, and appropriately refer youth to specialized services. The expert will coordinate their training of juvenile justice staff with the trauma-informed care initiative that DYFJ is currently implementing in partnership with Bellevue Hospital as part of the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative and the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) initiative ACS is launching to comply with new regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Justice to help juvenile facilities prevent, detect and respond to sexual misconduct. In addition to training, the expert will produce a resource guide that staff can use to refer young people when they are discharged from juvenile placements and detention. We will share the resource guide with other city agencies serving similar populations, including the NYC Department of Probation.

Sixth, we will use the funds to strengthen and provide additional expertise to Jewish Child Care Association and St. Luke's specialized sexually exploited programs with the goal of further developing their treatment service models, creating strategies to recruit foster homes for sexually exploited youth, and

for improving outreach efforts to ensure specialized programs are receiving appropriate referrals and are fully utilized.

Seventh, we will use the funding to hire an expert to work with ACS to develop a comprehensive plan on how best to respond to the issue of child sexual exploitation in New York City. Part of this vision will include enhanced coordination among city agencies, courts and city-wide stakeholders. The plan will also include an analysis of needs, types of services available, gaps in service, prioritization of new service needs for future funding allocations and outline both short-term and long-term goals towards an improved response to child sexual exploitation in New York City.

And finally, advocates and stakeholders city-wide, including the Council, have expressed the difficulties with, and the need for, an increase in collection of data on sexually exploited young people. To begin to address this issue, ACS will use a portion of this OCFS funding to hire a consultant to evaluate current data collection methods of sexually-exploited service providers in child welfare and juvenile justice, and identify both short-term and long-term opportunities to improve data collection, analysis, and reporting.

ACS continues to work systematically on a number of fronts through our child protective, preventive, foster care, and juvenile justice programs to identify youth that may be or have been sexually exploited and to train staff and establish services that can address this problem. Through these efforts, we have learned that identifying sexually exploited youth who come into contact with Children's Services can be very challenging for many reasons. Many youth are understandably reticent to disclose sexual exploitation; some feel ashamed, some fear retribution by their abusers, while others are conflicted about the potential prosecution of their abusers. As I mentioned earlier, youth also enter ACS care for a variety of reasons, including substance abuse, mental health concerns, and/or domestic violence. Any or all of these could mask issues relating to sexual exploitation. As the Council knows, identification of sexual exploitation is much more challenging than simply marking a box on a form. As much as we want to know what the need is, our priority is to serve and protect youth who need help.

Despite these challenges, we agree with the Council that collecting and tracking data regarding this population is important, which is why we are allocating funds to bolster our ability to track and share data among City agencies. We therefore support the proposed legislation requiring ACS and DYCD to submit an annual report documenting the number of youth who are referred to us as sexually exploited, who self-identify as sexually exploited, or who we determine to be sexually exploited at some point in our time serving them. We hope that with the additional state resources, New York City will have the ability to understand the extent of the need and be able to appropriately support and assist sexually exploited youth this population.

Thank you. I will now take your questions.