



**David A. Hansell, Commissioner**  
**Testimony to the New York City Council**  
**Committees on:**  
**Finance, General Welfare, and Juvenile Justice**  
**May 22, 2019**

***“New York City Council Fiscal Year 2020 Executive Budget Hearing”***

Good afternoon Chairs Dromm, Levin, and King, and members of the Committees on Finance, General Welfare, and Juvenile Justice. I am David Hansell, the Commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS). With me are Felipe Franco, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Youth and Family Justice; Julie Farber, Deputy Commissioner, Family Permanency Services; and Elizabeth Wolkomir, Assistant Commissioner, Finance.

Since becoming the ACS Commissioner, just over two years ago, my focus has been on strengthening the work we do to protect children and support families. Using data, evidence-based and best practices, and technology, we have made these systems stronger and made many strides in the right direction. To build on these accomplishments, I know that we must continue to invest in the work we are doing to help the most vulnerable children, youth and families in New York City.

### **Child Welfare**

Safety is our top priority at ACS, and we have strengthened all aspects of our child welfare work and enhanced our ability to keep children safe and support their families. We have reduced child protective caseloads, enhanced efficiency and effectiveness by providing new technological tools, strengthened our oversight and quality assurance processes, and enhanced training and professional development for staff.

This past year, nearly 20,000 families including more than 44,000 children received prevention services, while today there are approximately 8,300 children in

foster care. Comparing the most recent calendar year 2018 to 2017, ACS has seen child abuse and neglect reports, court filings, court-ordered supervision cases, and placements into foster care all decrease significantly.

ACS's continuum of prevention services has earned us a reputation as a national leader. This past October, ACS began rolling out new enhanced prevention services to support families receiving Court Ordered Supervision or at immediate risk of court involvement, diverting hundreds of families from court intervention. Just last month, ACS began to roll out "A Safe Way Forward," a new prevention demonstration project working with families experiencing domestic violence. This new program is the first of its kind in the country, as it will provide both prevention and clinical services to all members of families experiencing domestic violence, including the survivors, children and the person causing harm.

This summer, we will be issuing a new RFP for prevention services, which will build on our current system by focusing more heavily on evidence-based models and better allocating service models across the City in a way that expands access for families.

ACS is continuing to partner with our providers to ensure they have the resources they need to provide high-quality services to the children and families they serve. We engaged in a collaborative and fruitful process to address the staffing, training and programmatic needs of our prevention providers through the model budget process last year. More recently, we have taken steps to strengthen our homemaking program, which provides over one million hours of training and support to parents in

their home. To ensure adequate resources for these programs, ACS is processing contract amendments that will allow us to pay homemaking providers based on an approved line item budget for all allowable expenses, which will ensure that our providers receive more predictable cash flow to meet their expenses.

When our assessment of imminent risk of serious harm leads to a child's placement in foster care, ensuring the safety of that child is critical-- beginning day one. We have strenuous safety procedures in place to keep children safe in foster care and as they transition back to their families, and we are continuing to strengthen them. Because research shows that children in foster care have better outcomes if they are placed with relatives or other people they know, we have increased kinship placements from 31% of children in care at the end of FY 2017, to 38.5% in December 2018, and we are working to continue that progress.

To support these efforts, we are excited that the Mayor and the City Council recently came to an agreement that will provide ACS with \$7.8 million in FY20 to implement three recommendations from the Foster Care Task Force: \$3.3 million to increase kinship placements; \$2.8 million to improve family visiting for children in foster care; and \$1.7 million to support foster care agencies in preparing youth for the workforce. Chair Levin, I want to express my appreciation to you and Speaker Johnson for your relentless advocacy on this issue, and on behalf of youth in our foster care system generally. As we work to implement these recommendations, we also look forward to continued discussions with the City Council, the providers and the advocates about the Fair Futures proposal, which would provide educational supports to middle

school students in foster care and coaching for older youth in care and until they turn 26.

Providing high-quality care to children coming into foster care includes ensuring that children and youth are safe and well-cared for at the Children's Center and that their stay is as short as possible.

ACS recently conducted a thorough review of the needs of the children, as well as the operations at the Children's Center. We conducted an intensive case review of every child with special needs, and ensured that these children and youth were safe and healthy, and that their needs were being met. We hired a new Assistant Commissioner for Residential Care with extensive experience, and we are applying Deputy Commissioner Winette Saunders' expertise in youth programming, safety and security. We retained a consultant, Laura Velez, who brings extensive expertise as the former Deputy Commissioner for Child Welfare for the State.

The Children's Center provides a wide range of educational, recreational and social-emotional programs and we've added many new programs in the past two months, including the Lower East Side Girls Club and the National Arts Club. Youth at the Children's Center have applied for DYCD's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and the upcoming New York City Council Foster Youth Shadow Day.

Because we believe that a therapeutic environment must be safe for young people and staff alike, we have enhanced security through an increase in the number of peace officers on-site who are trained in de-escalation techniques, additional security

cameras, as well as enhanced collaboration with the NYPD where appropriate to ensure safety in the external environment.

We remain focused on efforts to help older youth, in particular, move to other settings as quickly as possible. To do this, we added case planners to the Children's Center to focus on finding kin or other foster care placements, and we are doing proactive home finding for youth in detention who are likely to be discharged to the Children's Center. We are increasing the foster care system's ability to meet the needs of youth with complex challenges by creating 144 new therapeutic family foster care slots, adding more residential care capacity and collaborating with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) on interventions for high-needs youth.

### **Juvenile Justice**

Since October 2018, ACS has been implementing the first phase of New York's historic Raise the Age legislation: all newly arrested 16-year-olds are now treated as juveniles, having their cases heard either in the Family Court or the Youth Part of Criminal Court, and if they are detained it is either in Crossroads Juvenile Detention Center or in one of our non-secure detention facilities. There are no longer any 16- or 17-year-olds on Riker's Island. And by October 2019, New York State will have fully raised the age, with 17-year-olds also being treated as juveniles in the justice system.

ACS has completed extensive renovations to our detention facilities and infused a therapeutic milieu, while adding extensive programming, educational and vocational options, into our detention and placement programs.

ACS's next step is to begin transitioning Youth Development Specialists (YDS) into Horizon. As required by the law, ACS and the Department of Correction are collaboratively operating the Horizon Juvenile Detention Center. ACS has hired over 425 YDS to date, on track to meet our goal of hiring approximately 700 YDS. ACS is set to assume full operational control of Horizon by January 2020. We began by bringing YDS to Horizon in April to observe operations, and then we will move to assume responsibility for security in planful stages so that the transition is seamless and orderly.

We have also been working with our Close to Home system providers to ensure they have the capacity and service array to implement Raise the Age. ACS has been working closely with MOCJ on projections of Close to Home capacity needs to accommodate the 16- and 17-year-olds who will be placed into Close to Home.

### **Child and Family Well-Being**

ACS is committed to focusing on equity, helping strengthen communities and preventing families from becoming involved in the child welfare system. We do this through community and family engagement, public awareness campaigns, and subsidized early childhood education, as well as the promotion of equity strategies across ACS' work. Our Family Enrichment Centers, Community Partnership Programs and Child Safety Campaigns will continue to provide a two-generational, community-based approach to address trauma and meet the individual needs of communities.

New York City has made major investments in high-quality early care and education programs over the last decade. EarlyLearn is due to transfer to the NYC

Department of Education's (DOE) Division of Early Childhood Education this summer. ACS will continue to administer the City's child care voucher system, making child care available to the most vulnerable families in New York City.

### **Budget Overview**

ACS's proposed FY 2020 Executive Budget plan provides for expenses of \$2.66 billion, of which \$878 million is city tax levy. As with all City agencies, ACS received a PEG target-- ours was \$68 million over two years. ACS has met this target in the Executive Budget with reductions of \$42 million in FY19 and \$26 million in FY20. These reductions were almost entirely met through increasing revenue, including federal Title IV-E funds and decreasing costs associated with placing fewer young people in upstate OCFS facilities. This budget does include a \$2 million city tax levy reduction in funding for administrative expenses such as supplies, consultants, training and travel. ACS is working with OMB to implement this reduction across divisions.

I can report that through our work with OMB, we were able to identify savings that will not reduce any essential services or the number of critical frontline staff.

### **State and Federal Budget Concerns**

While ACS has been able to find efficiencies without impacting programs, services or frontline staff, we remain concerned that historical state budget cuts and looming federal reductions threaten to undermine our efforts and successes to date.



While the State pulled back on its plan to eliminate all of the state's support for ACS's PINS diversion programs, the State's FY20 budget maintained the \$62 million cut to NYC's foster care funding, as well as the lowered reimbursement rate for child welfare services, which costs NYC about \$20 million each year. Furthermore, the State eliminated all support for the Close to Home program and required that counties remain under the 2% property tax cap to receive Raise the Age funding, which leaves NYC out.

This month, the state released preliminary new child care Market Rates, which increase the rates for child care. While the state budget included \$26 million for counties outside NYC to implement the new rate, NYC is not receiving any additional state funding.

At the federal level, ACS remains concerned that our Title IV-E waiver, which allows ACS to use federal IV-E resources to support an innovative, flexible funding model for family foster care, expires in September. A preliminary evaluation shows the waiver has been successful, resulting in shorter lengths of stay for children in foster care, lower foster care re-entry rates for babies, and improvements in placement stability. Despite the fact that many jurisdictions have successful waiver demonstration projects, there is currently no legislative authority to extend these waivers.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the ACS Fiscal Year 2020 Executive Budget with you today. I am committed to ensuring that our work is not hindered by

budget cuts, and that ultimately, we provide children and families with the services and support that they need. I thank the Council for your leadership and steadfast support, and I look forward to our continued partnership. I am happy to answer your questions.