

**Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees  
on the SFY 2010-11 *Executive Budget*  
Human Services Hearing  
February 10, 2010**

**Presented by  
Karen Schimke, President and CEO  
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy**



*Shaping New York State public policy  
for people in need since 1872*

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My name is Karen Schimke and I am President and CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA). SCAA has provided a strong advocacy voice for our state's most vulnerable citizens for over 137 years, testifying yearly before this joint budget hearing speaking to children's and families' needs for shelter, food, safety, and child care.

While I do understand the state's fiscal problems and the reality that there simply is not enough money this year, I am here today to talk about the 2010-2011 *Executive Budget* as it relates to our state's most vulnerable children and families. There's a lot of talk about serving the people at our door—those currently in need of supports—instead of putting money into programs that will prevent people from being “at our door” in the future. This rationale is flawed for a number of reasons.

First, many families are having trouble *right now* providing the basic necessities—food, clothing, and shelter. They rely on these services for housing, for employment, for educational and work supports. In the short-term, they are the ones that will suffer from cuts to services and supports.

Second, cutting these services now only means that we'll pay doubly in the future. In the long-term, our entire state will suffer. Reducing services to the most vulnerable will not only mean more child abuse and worse educational outcomes, it will mean an increase in the need for services when the recession finally ends. By taking away the safety net, we are essentially allowing people to fall through the cracks. They will resurface in other systems—child welfare, juvenile justice and corrections. They will become homeless, drop out of school, and lose their jobs. This doesn't make sense for our state, and we cannot let it happen.

When the economy takes a downturn as it has over the past two years, it is the families served by the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance and the Office of Children and Family Services who suffer most. The funding provided by these two state agencies for programs and services can be viewed as investments in the development of New York State's future workforce and economic vitality. We are concerned that, after several rounds of cuts to important programs and services over the past two years, we may be achieving cost savings today at a very high price in the state's future. Families served by these agencies will have a much harder time making it through this recession and we will all be worse off on the other side. In particular, when it comes to cuts to children's services, it is simply unconscionable that they become collateral damage during this fiscal crisis.

Before I talk about those cuts, I want to acknowledge several programs and services which SCAA supports in the *Executive Budget*.

#### **Right-sizing of Juvenile Justice Facilities**

SCAA supports the closing of 180 beds as outlined in the Governor's budget and the investment of \$18 million to improve staffing ratios and mental health services at the facilities investigated by the U.S. Department of Justice. These are essential reforms for a system under threat of takeover by the federal government.

#### **Child Welfare and "65/35" Preventive funding**

We appreciate the stability of funding for child welfare programs and services in the *Executive Budget*. SCAA supports the \$77 million increase to the "65/35" uncapped funding for child welfare services. The "65/35" preventive dollars are critical to keeping children at risk of foster care from placement. Unfortunately, the "65/35" state/local share remains at 63.7/36.3. We know this is not the year to return the state share to full value but we do not want to lose sight of the goal to fully fund the state/local partnership for these services at some point in the future.

#### **Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS)**

SCAA also supports the maintenance of funding for Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS), which can be used for services to children and families not known to the system, in school, mental health and other settings. The \$26 million in the *Executive Budget* will allow existing programs to continue operations.

#### **Bridges to Health**

SCAA supports the continued commitment to Bridges to Health and increased funding to provide 3,305 slots as planned with a \$41 million increase in funding. Bridges to Health is a Medicaid waiver program that provides comprehensive and intensive health and mental health services to children and families in foster care and institutional care settings. This expansion will allow the program to continue to enroll children and families. This program has already shown great promise for successfully transitioning children with extensive health and mental health needs back to their families and community.

Many programs and services received cuts which will have devastating consequences for the people who need them most. I want to bring several to your attention.

#### **Restore funding for Healthy Families New York (HFNY) to \$25 million**

The 2010 *Executive Budget* drastically reduces funding for home visiting—programs that have proven effective in decreasing child abuse and neglect and increasing school readiness. The proposed cuts amount to a 40% reduction in Healthy Families New York funding over three years. These cuts will ravage the home visiting system New York has built over 15 years and leave children more vulnerable to harm.

These budget cuts would also disqualify New York State from applying for \$100-\$150 million in federal aid for home visiting. We cannot put ourselves in the position of being ineligible for much-needed resources.

HFNY serves more than 5,000 families a year in some of New York's highest need communities, with a proven track record of better outcomes for children in high-risk families. In addition to reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect:

- 50% of families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits upon entering the program are no longer in need of that assistance
- 81% are enrolled in a job training or education program by the child's first birthday
- 57% of participants under age 21 have received a high school degree or GED by the child's first birthday

HFNY recoups its expenses in the first year. It currently employs nearly 500 people in 39 communities across the state. HFNY was funded at \$25 million just two years ago. The *Executive Budget* would cut funding to only \$15 million, effectively closing programs across the state. For every five children served by HFNY programs two years ago, only three children will be served in 2010-2011 budget year if these cuts go into effect.

### **Restore funding for Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) to \$5 million**

NFP programs are located in New York City and in Monroe and Onondaga Counties, serving an estimated 2,500 families. It also has a proven track record of better outcomes for children in high-risk families:

- 83% increase in labor force participation of mothers at child age four
- 56% reduction in emergency room visits for accidents and poisonings
- 46% increase in father's presence in the household
- 20% reduction in use of public assistance

Research shows that every dollar invested in NFP can yield more than \$5 in return. The *Executive Budget* eliminates \$5 million in funding for the program.

### **Increase Child Care Block Grant funding**

Child care is a critical part of the daily lives of thousands of New Yorkers with young children. Parents rely on child care in order to go to work and, most importantly, to know that their children are well cared for and safe. For many families, especially low-income working families, the expense places high-quality care beyond their reach, leaving parents to make the difficult choice of giving up quality for affordability. This is particularly problematic because research shows that high-quality care is beneficial to young children, but poor quality care can be harmful. And the impact of quality early childhood experiences is pronounced for lower income children, who are more likely to be less school ready than higher income classmates.

Yet, child care funding in New York State has never kept up with need. There are 1.3 million young children in New York State, nearly half of whom—40%—live in low-income families. Last year, the state used both roll-over funding from 2008-09 and new ARRA funds to fill gaps in county subsidy programs. Still, in FY 2009-10, counties ran out of child care funding and hundreds of families lost child care subsidies, forcing them to pull their children out of child care programs and jeopardizing their own ability to work. We do New York State a disservice if we let children go without care and prevent parents from working. To maintain the same number of children in child care programs this year as last, the state needs to add \$40 to \$50 million to the Child Care Block Grant.

### **Restore Child Care Subsidies**

As I noted earlier, child care is critical to the livelihood of many New York parents. Subsidies help student parents provide for their families while attending school. The *Executive Budget* this year eliminates child care subsidies for SUNY and CUNY student parents. Also eliminated is a Facilitated Enrollment Program that reaches out to low-income working families and helps them to obtain child care subsidy assistance. Both programs need to be restored.

### **Phase in the Public Assistance grant increase as scheduled**

The 2009-10 *Executive Budget* provided an increase of 30% in the public assistance grant to be implemented over a three-year time period in 10% yearly increments through July 2011. The 2010-11 *Executive Budget* maintains the commitment to increase the grant by 30% but stretches the time period to July 2014 by offering 5% yearly growth instead of the planned 10%. The projected savings totals \$18 million. We appreciate the commitment made by the Governor to the state's most vulnerable population by maintaining the promise of a 30% increase. However, we are disappointed that the state's families who are most deeply affected by this recession will have to wait an extra three years. They have already waited 20 years. Every dollar of this money is spent in local communities, serving to stimulate the economy immediately.

### **Restore \$202 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for program services for vulnerable children and families**

For a number of years, SCAA has raised concern about the increasing pressures on the surplus TANF funds and their use in New York State to pay for critical services. We recommended transferring the costs of these important programs to the general fund in order to free TANF dollars to support child care and welfare-to-work efforts.

Now the *Executive Budget* includes profound cuts to some programs while others were eliminated; nearly \$100 million was cut from children's services alone. Attached is a list of specific programs and services which we ask you to restore to previous funding levels. Having already mentioned the importance of home visiting programs and child care, I bring three others to your attention:

#### **Advantage Afterschool**

Afterschool programs keep kids safe, improve school achievement, prevent crime, and help parents go to work every day. They also employ thousands of people across New York State. Proposed cuts to afterschool programs will eliminate access to programs for more than 10,000 children and between 1,000 and 3,000 adults will lose their jobs in afterschool programs. A restoration to \$30.5 million would benefit children, families, and the workforce.

#### **Alternatives to Detention and Residential Placement**

SCAA supports measures which keep children and youth in their homes and communities whenever possible, preventing more costly placements in residential settings. Our concern rests with the lack of investment in community-based services to meet these youths' needs in their neighborhoods. The *Executive Budget* cuts over \$10 million in TANF funding for Alternatives to Detention and Alternatives to Residential Placement, the very programs designed to provide supports to youth in trouble and keep them out of costly residential facilities.

**Housing Services and Assistance**

Normally, SCAA does not comment on housing issues. However, we are most concerned about the \$12 million in TANF funding eliminated for housing services. The cuts affect supportive housing for families and those youth under age 25 who exit foster care or runaway, and homeless programs. And they impact the stability of families and their children who are on the verge of homelessness who require assistance to remain in their current residence. There were other housing cuts in the OTDA budget as well. The cost savings achieved through these program cuts are made at great expense to the families and individuals in New York State most in need during this recession.

**Support Subsidized Guardianship**

The Governor's *Executive Budget* proposes a new initiative, Subsidized Guardianship. Subsidized guardianship is offered in 37 states and the District of Columbia as a permanency option for children in foster care. The 2008 Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act now allows states to use Title IV-E funding to support subsidized guardianships in cases where children have been in the care of a relative for six months and when returning home or adoption have been ruled out.

SCAA supports subsidized guardianship as a permanency option for New York State. There are many benefits for foster care children with this option. Kin placements are more stable, the children are less traumatized, and sibling relationships are more likely to be maintained. The option helps children who would otherwise age out of foster care find stability and freedom from the fear that they will be uprooted once again. Further, the option reduces the average length of stay in foster care significantly and does not affect reunification rates. We urge your support for this alternative path to permanency.

While we fully understand the state's fiscal reality, we believe these services deserve your attention and support. As you negotiate this budget and look at restoration of funds for a specific program or service, do not take funding away from programs benefitting children. Children need a solid foundation to become successful adults. They need a healthy start, effective education, and safe, thriving communities. We know that investments in services and supports for children, youth, and families save money, reduce crime, help working parents and create jobs. For the future of New York State, we need a budget that helps kids reach their potential.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and am available for your questions.

**2010-2011 TANF Funding Restoration Request  
(Dollars in Thousands)**

<b>PROGRAM</b>	<b>Executive Budget 21 Day Amendments Needed</b>
ACCESS - Welfare-to-Careers	\$500
Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking (ATTAIN)	\$7,000
Advantage Schools	\$11,391
Alternatives to Detention / Alternatives to Residential Placement	\$10,752
Bridge	\$8,503
Career Pathways	\$10,000
Caretaker Relative	\$1,998
Centro of Oneida	\$125
Child Care CUNY	\$1,440
Child Care Demonstration Projects	\$10,900
Child Care Migrant Workers	\$1,754
Child Care SUNY	\$1,960
Community Reinvestment / Alternatives to Detention	\$5,000
Community Solutions to Transportation	\$2,200
Disability Advocacy Program (DAP)	\$1,000
Displaced Homemakers	\$5,600
Educational Resources	\$3,000
Emergency Homeless	\$2,000
Green Jobs Corps Program	\$5,000
Home Visiting	\$5,822
Local Interagency VESID Employment Services (LIVES)	\$1,500
Non-residential Domestic Violence	\$3,000
Nurse Family Partnership	\$5,000
Preventive Services	\$18,792
Refugee Resettlement	\$1,425
Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority	\$2,000
Settlement House	\$6,000
Strengthening Families through Stronger Fathers	\$2,764
Summer Youth Employment	\$35,000
Supplemental Homeless Intervention Program	\$5,000
Supportive Housing for Families	\$5,000
Wage Subsidy	\$14,000
Wheels for Work	\$7,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$202,426</b>