

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy's child welfare priorities focus on strengthening families with proven prevention and family-oriented services, bolstering kin caregivers, and supporting youth transitioning out of foster care.

New York State has long been a leader nationally in its investment in services designed to prevent maltreatment and keep children safely with their families. This emphasis on keeping families together is supported by the overwhelming social science evidence showing that in most cases, children are better off remaining with their families – with appropriate supports.¹ This is particularly the case for instances of neglect, which constitute the overwhelming majority of maltreatment cases.²

Notwithstanding New York's longstanding commitment to prevention, preliminary data gathered as part of a periodic federal review (the Child and Family Services Review), found that children involved with the New York child welfare system are less safe than children in nearly every other state. New York also ranks poorly compared to other states on the time it takes for children in foster care to be placed in a permanent home.³

New York's Child Welfare Financing Law is up for renewal in 2017, providing an opportunity for the State to build upon the many strengths of its system. To that end, we respectfully recommend continuing the State's strong commitment to preventive services and the following strategic, targeted investments:

Preserve Open-ended Preventive Funding, Restore State Share to 65% and Track Results

The State should renew its investment in preventive services that keep children safe and families strong by preserving open-ended preventive funding and restoring the State reimbursement to 65%, as is written in statute (NY SSL sec. 153-k). The restored 3% should be directed to fund primary preventive services – services that localities can offer before there have been allegations of maltreatment. It is

essential that this funding remain open-ended so that counties may invest as needed in services that help children avoid foster care. Further, the State should encourage and support counties' investment in evidence-based family strengthening services that keep children safely with their families, and track program results.

Invest in Kin Care Services and Enhance the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP)

Placing children with relatives when their parents are unable to care for them helps to maintain connections to family and culture. New York should support kinship families and cultivate permanent placements for children with family members through the Kinship Navigator, kinship services, and KinGAP.

- Maintain State funding for kinship services at **\$2.3 million** to ensure that families have access to services.
- Expand a *permission to contact* procedure so that the Kinship Navigator can better connect kinship families to services. Support this implementation by increasing funding for the Navigator by \$89,500 to fund a full-time in-take professional and support training of social services staff, bringing total funding for the Kinship Navigator to **\$410,000**.
- Improve services and outcomes for children who are being cared for by kin when their parents cannot care for them due to immigration detention or deportation. This issue will require significant attention, should the incoming Presidential administration make good on promises to dramatically increase deportations of immigrants.

So that more families can take advantage of KinGAP the State should:

- Remove it from the Foster Care Block Grant and fund it like the adoption subsidy;

- Allow payments to continue until age 21 regardless of age of finalization;
- Use the same definition of kin as is used for kinship foster care, so that half siblings are considered in sibling groups and “fictive kin,” such as godparents, are eligible.

Strengthen the Child Welfare Housing Subsidy Program

As many as one-third of the approximately 1,300 New York youth who age out of foster care each year experience homelessness, and many more experience unstable housing arrangements.^{4,5} To prevent homelessness and housing instability among former foster youth, the State should increase the child welfare housing subsidy allowance to \$600 (from \$300); increase the upper age limit eligibility from 21 to 24 so that youth who age out of foster care at 21 can avail themselves of the subsidy for up to 3 years; and allow youth receiving the housing subsidy to live with unrelated roommates to save on expenses.

Support Foster Youth Attending College

Only 2 to 7% of foster youth complete a two- or four-year degree leaving them less likely to secure and retain employment in adulthood. The State must invest in our youth in foster care by renewing its investment in the Foster College Success Initiative and increasing funding to **\$4.5 million** to support youth pursuing higher education who either are or had been in foster care.

Expand Access to Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Programs

Home visiting is a cost-effective two-generation intervention associated with numerous positive health, educational and well-being outcomes for

children and families, including a substantial reduction in child maltreatment rates in at-risk families.⁶ The State should improve coordination and measurement across programs, expand access, and increase funding for home visiting to **\$38.8 million**, which includes:

- \$27.8 million to Healthy Families NY;
- \$6 million for Nurse-Family Partnership;
- \$3 million to Parents as Teachers;
- \$2 million for Parent-Child Home.

A Strong and Supported Workforce

The child welfare workforce – from preventive services to Child Protective Services to foster care and beyond – is the backbone of a strong and supportive system. However, across New York State, caseloads for these workers vary greatly – from CPS caseloads of about 12 in New York City⁷ to as high as 40 in Erie County⁸ – well above the CPS caseload of 12 recommended by researchers.⁹ The State should provide adequate funding and support to improve the capacity of the workforce to meet the needs of children and families.

Raise the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction

New York is one of only two states to automatically try all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults in the justice system. It is time for New York to raise the age of criminal responsibility. The State should support recommendations from the Governor’s Commission on Public Safety and Juvenile Justice to enact comprehensive legislation to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction and better support the juvenile justice system so that children are treated as children.

¹ Doyle, J. (2007, Dec.). Child Protection and Child Outcomes: Measuring the Effects of Foster Care. *American Economic Review*, vol. 97, no. 5, pp. 1583-1610. Retrieved: <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.97.5.1583>

² *The Institute of Medicine*. (2013, Sept. 12). New Directions in Child Abuse and Neglect Research. Retrieved: <http://iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2013/New-Directions-in-Child-Abuse-and-Neglect-Research.aspx>

³ See: <http://www.scaany.org/policy-areas/child-welfare/>

⁴ Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center. (2014). Children Exiting Foster Care by Exit Reason. Retrieved:

<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6277-children-exiting-foster-care-by-exit-reason?loc=34&loct=2#detailed/2/34/false/36,868,867,133,38/2629,2630,2631,2632,2633,2634,2635,2636/13050,13051>

⁵ US Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2014, May). Housing for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care. Retrieved:

http://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/youth_hsg_main_report.pdf

⁶ Dumont, et al. (2010). Final Report: A Randomized Trial of Healthy Families New York: Does Home Visiting Prevent Child Maltreatment.

⁷ New York City Administration for Children’s Services. (2015, November). Flash. Retrieved: http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/Flash_Nov_2015.pdf

⁸ Michel, Lou. (February 17, 2014). Erie County taking steps to reduce caseloads for child-protective workers. *The Buffalo News*. Retrieved:

<http://www.buffalonews.com/city-region/erie-county/erie-county-taking-steps-to-reduce-caseloads-for-child-protective-workers-20140217>

⁹ New York State Office of Children & Family Services. (2006). New York State Child Welfare Workload Study: Final Report, submitted by Walter R. MacDonald & Associates. Retrieved from: <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/reports/WorkloadStudy.pdf>