

MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

S.4339 Salazar / A.4258 Hevesi

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy urges the Senate to join the Assembly in passing legislation to strengthen the child welfare housing subsidy to allow more youth and families to utilize the subsidy and attain housing stability.

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy is a 148-year-old statewide, nonprofit, policy analysis and advocacy organization working to shape policies to strengthen families and improve health, welfare and human services for all New Yorkers. Schuyler Center supports S.4339/A.4258 to amend the Social Services Law section 409-a to strengthen the child welfare housing subsidy to reflect increased housing costs and better address the needs of youth and families involved in the child welfare system.

Housing is critical to family stability and safety, and the child welfare housing subsidy is a vital support to families for whom unstable housing plays a part in their involvement in the child welfare system. The housing subsidy can be used as a preventive service to prevent children from entering foster care and as a way to expedite reunification from foster care. In addition, the housing subsidy can help youth aging out of foster care – who often face tremendous housing instability – from becoming homeless.

However, the housing subsidy amount has not changed since the housing subsidy was created in 1988, and, at the same time, it has been construed to prohibit recipients of the subsidy from having a roommate. With housing costs having increased exponentially since 1988, the low subsidy amount and prohibition on roommates have rendered the subsidy largely ineffective at achieving its intended purpose of helping stabilize the housing of families and enabling young adults to leave foster care into independent living.

S.4339/A.4258 would amend the subsidy law to allow recipients to live with roommates. For many families, and young adults, living with roommates is both a practical financial decision and a means of finding important social supports.

By passing this piece of legislation, New York has the opportunity to strengthen its housing subsidy program so that more youth and families may find stability and independence through housing.

We also look forward to working with the Legislature in the near future to further strengthen this housing subsidy by (1) increasing the subsidy amount to better reflect current housing costs; and (2) extending the upper age limit that a young person aging out of foster care can receive the benefit to 24, allowing youth who age out of foster care at 21 to avail themselves of the benefit when they are transitioning from foster care – exactly when they need it most.

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