



**Office of Children
and Family Services**

**LEGISLATIVE FISCAL COMMITTEES'
JOINT BUDGET HEARING**

State Fiscal Year 2016-2017

Executive Budget

Human Services

Tuesday, February 9, 2016

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Sheila J. Poole, Acting Commissioner

New York State Office of Children and Family Services

Good morning Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell, Senate Children and Families Committee Chair Avella, Assembly Children and Families Chair Lupardo, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly. My name is Sheila Poole, and I am the Acting Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

This year's Executive Budget reaffirms the Governor's commitment to a balanced and fiscally-responsible budget that strongly supports OCFS' core mission. As an agency dedicated to serving the children, youth and families of New York State, OCFS oversees a wide range of programs and services in the critically important areas of child welfare and community services; child care and juvenile justice and opportunities for youth.

The proposed Executive Budget maintains vital agency funding at last year's level while making investments in key initiatives that will benefit all of the populations that OCFS serves. One example of that funding is for Child Welfare Services. The Executive Budget recommends \$635 million to continue supporting Child Welfare Services, renewing New York's commitment of 62 percent state reimbursement. Supplementing other available federal funds, these dollars support a host of child protective, child preventive, aftercare, independent living, and adoption services. New York is a national leader in providing robust funding for these efforts, which make a difference in the lives of thousands of New York State's children and families. This investment supports the critical work of our local social services departments. It also funds the essential programs and services provided by our child welfare partners in community-based agencies throughout the state.

The Executive Budget proposal includes \$445.5 million in Foster Care Block Grant funding to support foster care services, including kinship programs. Local districts continue to have the ability to reinvest any unused funds in the next fiscal year, which can be used to support locally designed child welfare initiatives that strengthen preventive services and better serve high-needs children who can benefit from independent living or aftercare services.

The proposed budget also includes an addition of \$4.5 million in funding to support programs that serve this population under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

The Governor's budget proposal includes authority to invest adoption assistance savings of \$5 million into preventive services and other post-adoption services as required by federal law for children at risk of entering foster care. OCFS plans to use these funds to support Permanency Resource Centers to provide post-adoptive and kinship support to families.

The Executive Budget continues the critical investment in the Child Care Subsidy Program for 2016-2017 at \$799 million. These funds enable low-income working families to access affordable child care and support New York State's child care providers.

A \$5 million investment in the QUALITYstarsNY program would support the implementation of a quality rating and improvement system to provide high quality early learning programs and enable the state to mandate participation for low-quality programs as a condition of receiving state funding.

This year's budget proposal also reflects the Governor's continuing commitment to raising the age of criminal responsibility in New York State from 16 to 18. New York State took a bold step forward in December with the Executive Order that will remove most minors from adult prisons and house them in age-appropriate correctional facilities with specialized programs offering them a better chance to turn their lives around and find a brighter future. While the Executive Order is an important step, and OCFS strongly supports this action, it does not raise the age.

The reasons to raise the age are many. We know that when troubled youth are sent to an adult prison, it sets the stage for a life of violence, recidivism, and little prospect for the rehabilitation that would prepare them to return to their communities as productive and responsible adults. Removing young people from the adult criminal system will improve outcomes and make a vast difference in the lives of these 16-and 17-year-olds.

Additionally, the Executive Budget proposal increases funding for the Human Services Call Center by \$600,000 for a total of \$14.1 million. The Call Center was established upon recommendation of the Spending and Government Efficiency (SAGE) Commission and now answers more than 30 telephone lines for ten state agencies. We anticipate a call volume of 1.2 million calls in the coming year.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address you today. I welcome your questions and comments.