



**2024 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on
Human Services
January 31, 2024**

Bivona Child Advocacy Center's Testimony

Submitted by:
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January 26, 2024

Executive Summary

Thank you to all the members of the Legislature for allowing me to submit testimony for this important hearing, specifically as it relates to the status of Child Advocacy Centers in New York State.

My name is Dr. Daniele Lyman-Torres and I am the President and CEO of Bivona Child Advocacy Center. Founded in 2004, Bivona is considered a premier Child Advocacy Center in the Northeast. Located in Rochester, New York and serving Monroe, Livingston, Wayne, Genesee, Orleans, Ontario, and Seneca counties, Bivona delivers excellence in child abuse response, healing, and prevention through collaborative service, awareness, education, and leadership. Our vision is a community where all children are safe and free from abuse. Bivona CAC serves 2,000 children each year through investigative and healing services. Our multidisciplinary team is made up of 23 partner agencies who collaboratively work together to keep children safe and help them heal from their trauma. In addition to the children who come to Bivona CAC in the aftermath of abuse, we serve an additional 50,000 children each year in 24 school districts by providing prevention education.

In 2022, Child Advocacy Centers in OCFS Regions 1 and 2 served about 3,600 children with intervention services. Of that number, **Bivona CAC saw more than 60% of the cases in those regions, yet only received \$270,000 in operating support.** CACs see children who have experienced severe physical abuse, sexual abuse, or witnessed violent crimes. One in seven children experience abuse, so we know we are still only reaching some of the children impacted.

CACs are Under Supported

Child Advocacy Centers (“CAC”) were established in 2006 by the New York State Legislature, specifically in Chapter 517 of Section 2:423-A of the NYS Social Services. The legislation states: “The office of children and family services shall, to the greatest extent practicable, facilitate the establishment of child advocacy centers in every region of the state so that child victims of sexual abuse or serious physical abuse have reasonable access to such a center. Cases should be handled in an expert and timely manner, through a coordinated and cooperative effort that minimizes trauma to the children and their non-offending family members. Child advocacy centers shall be established by either a governmental entity or a private, nonprofit incorporated agency and shall meet the state office of children and family services program standards for child advocacy centers approval. They should strive to co-locate members of the local multi-disciplinary team at the child advocacy center.”

When the NYS Legislature codified CAC's into law, they dedicated funding through the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to support the establishment of CAC's throughout the state of New York. In 2006, the amount allocated by the Office of Budget to support CAC's statewide was 5.8 Million. Despite the state's intention to establish a sustained organization, very little funding has been provided to the larger agencies like Bivona Child Advocacy Center (BCAC). Unfortunately, in the 2023 NYS Budget, **BCAC received less than \$270,000** from OCFS for CAC services, and because it is a stand-alone organization, increased funding is imperative to keep providing exceptional service to the community. The actual expenses for the organization total nearly \$4million annually to operate.

While OCFS worked to establish a "CAC" in every county of NY, that has not at all been possible. Smaller counties do not have the infrastructure to create the actual CAC one-stop model of co-located services. Funding is being provided to have 1-2 coordinators in the smaller counties. To best serve the children in their communities, the smaller counties are transporting children to the larger centers in Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, and NYC to get the actual CAC model of services. This is an inefficient use of funds, and it does not provide reasonable access to services stated in the legislation. By creating a regional model, funds can be more directly allocated, communities can be clear on who their service providers are, and formalized partnerships and collaborations can be formed to support children and families more effectively in every area of the state.

Given the amount of services that BCAC and other statewide CAC's provide to the counties they serve, the current allocated amount is surely lacking and should include the number of clients served, the number of counties covered, the type of services provided, and additional funding for prevention services.

Over the years, CAC's have been required to expand their scope of work to better serve the clients that have come to their offices and at the request of partnership agencies. Now, CAC's are asked to do more work with very little funding to support that work and also deal with ever-changing laws. Consequently, the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased family disputes, and additional support is needed, requiring CAC services and resources. Additionally, CAC's across the board are grappling with ongoing workforce shortages, staff turnover, and economic issues that have significantly impacted BCAC's fundraising efforts and threaten its revenue security. Without increased government support, New York CAC's will never be able to meet the demand for services.

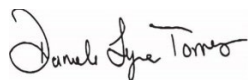
Our Asks

- Bivona Child Advocacy Center urges the Legislature to **regionalize Child Advocacy Center services** to ensure that even existing resources can be best aligned and effectively utilized to better serve children in both urban and rural areas.
- Also, **review and revise funding allocation structure** to provide the funding and support to the organizations providing the direct services in the Multi-Disciplinary Team model with all services co-located. **Bivona CAC is doing 60% of the service delivery across 2 regions, but only receiving 6.5% operating support.**
- Additionally, we urge the Legislature **to increase available funding to Child Advocacy Centers**, as the support for operations has not kept up with the demand and growing complexities of serving children and families so significantly traumatized. The trauma is compounded by intergenerational impacts.

Conclusion – Honorable Legislators, our ask is simple. **Keep children safe.** We can do that best when community resources are coordinated and adequately funded. Our children deserve a chance to grow up without the trauma of abuse. Our world needs them to, but yet, we have not kept pace with the growing complexities of the trauma, nor provided the resources required to make a difference. You have the power to impact that in many ways- but **Policy and Funding** are your greatest strengths.

Thank you to the Legislature for this opportunity to testify today. I would like to thank all members of the legislature for the impact you have made on the lives of New Yorkers. I know you care about the safety of children in New York and on behalf of Bivona Child Advocacy Center and our partner agencies working on cases of child abuse, I appreciate your consideration of our requests. If there are any questions I can answer for you, my contact information is below.

Sincerely,



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