



Office of Children and Family Services

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL COMMITTEES' JOINT BUDGET HEARING

**SFY 2025-26 Executive Budget
Human Services**

**Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden, MBA, M.S.
Commissioner**

Wednesday, February 12, 2025

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State Fiscal Year 2025-26 Executive Budget – Human Services
Wednesday, February 12, 2025, 9:30 AM
New York State Office of Children and Family Services
Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden, MBA, M.S., Commissioner

Good morning, Chair Pretlow and Chair Krueger, Children and Families Committee Chairs Hevesi and Brisport, and distinguished Members of the Senate and Assembly. I am Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). I appear before this honorable body for the first time with the privilege of presenting Governor Hochul's State Fiscal Year 2025-26 Executive Budget for OCFS.

OCFS oversees a continuum of services across New York State aimed at promoting the safety, permanency, and wellbeing of children, youth, families and individuals. OCFS is the steward of a nearly \$5.8 billion-dollar budget that supports critical health and safety 24/7 operations and more than 3,000 employees. The agency is an epicenter of extremes – serving New Yorkers from twinkle to wrinkle – the most innocent children to the most elderly of our communities.

OCFS is charged with oversight and operational responsibilities, executed directly and through public, private and nonprofit partnerships that spans across almost every domain. As a state supervised and locally administered system, our responsibilities include oversight of local social services districts for child welfare, domestic violence and adult protective services, Youth Bureaus, foster care agencies, family and child care centers, and after-school settings. We also provide direct services to blind New Yorkers.

With several months' tenure in my role, I am in awe of the work that is accomplished by this agency. I have seen firsthand the tangible impact it has on communities across the state. OCFS manages upwards of 6,000 contracts annually for a wide range of interventions and critical supports; operates nine residential youth justice facilities that require 24/7 supervision and supports to youth placed in our custody by family and criminal courts. Last year, the Statewide Central Register for Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) handled over 280,000 calls related to child safety and the Human Services Call Center handled over one million calls on behalf of its 11 customer agencies. I am proud to share that in 2024, OCFS also distributed more than 9,000 cribs across the state, provided over 2,700 duffel bags statewide to children leaving their homes and entering foster care, and launched the Heartline, a prevention service for youth 14 and older who are currently in, or who have recently left foster care.

The work that OCFS performs is far too exhaustive to enumerate today; yet, it could not be done without the commendable budget of our Executive, Governor Hochul, and through partnership with our elected officials.

The SFY25-26 Executive Budget underscores Governor Hochul's commitment to the most vulnerable, making our great state more affordable for children and families to live and thrive and supports the educational, social, emotional, physical, and mental health and well-being of children, youth, and families.

The Governor's *Get Offline, Get Outside 2.0* initiative in the Executive Budget includes an investment of \$15 million in increased funding for youth programming, \$7.5 million in Youth Sports and Education Opportunity funding and a \$7.5 million increase in base funding for the Youth Development Program. With this new support, more than 100,000 youth will be able to participate in sports and other pro-social programs. This is just one of the Governor's many proposals to better engage youth and disrupt social media addiction. In addition to the other educational features included within this budget, there is \$7 million in new funding for the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program, aimed at increasing literacy outcomes by providing access to free books each month to hundreds of thousands of children ages zero to five across the state.

This year's investment in runaway and homeless youth services is to be applauded. The \$10 million included in the Executive Budget reflects a doubling of the allocation over the last three years. This critical funding are life lines to vulnerable youth who need stable shelter, transitional housing access, and tailored comprehensive services to meet their individualized needs. Evidenced by the \$9.2 million increase for Child Advocacy Centers, Governor Hochul is committed to the protection of victims of unthinkable crimes, including those involving young children.

Since taking office, Governor Hochul's Executive Budget has included a Targeted Inflationary Increase. This year's 2.1 percent increase will once again benefit the families and voluntary agencies who care for New York's children in foster care, and adoptive parents. The Budget also includes a more than \$4.1 million increase in funding – more than \$14.1 million overall – to raise the minimum wage of employees of OCFS-funded contractors.

Governor Hochul has invested in child care in a way no other Governor has. Unwavering in her dedication to expanding access to high-quality child care for New York's families, there has been a \$7 billion increase over four years. This historic commitment has resulted in the largest expansion of the Child Care Assistance Program in New York State's history. Now, more than half of New York's families are income eligible. Under the Governor's leadership, income eligibility has been increased to the federal maximum of 85 percent State Median Income (SMI), which is currently more than \$108,000 per year for a family of four, and family copays have been capped statewide at one percent of a family's income above the poverty level. Families also have the stability of their child care assistance being available for a minimum of 12 months. Governor Hochul has more than doubled the amount of funding for the Child Care Assistance Program during her time in office, from \$832 million in SFY 2022 to nearly \$1.8 billion in this year's Executive Budget.

The Governor's comprehensive strategy has also included supporting our essential child care providers. New York is one of only a handful of states that sets payment rates for child care assistance at the 80th percentile. Not only does this give families receiving assistance access to 80 percent of the overall child care marketplace, but it allows providers to better meet health, safety, quality, and staffing requirements to provide quality child care. In addition, market rates increased by an average of 12 percent with the most recent market rate survey and have increased by an average of 48 percent since 2019. The Governor's proposal linking mental health supports to after-school environments expands upon last year's commitment that increased child care providers' access to early childhood mental health consultants.

As part of the Governor's efforts to increase the supply of child care, OCFS was pleased to partner with DASNY to award \$50 million in capital grants last year to create an estimated 5,500 new child care seats at 45 sites across the state. This year's Executive Budget doubles that investment by providing \$100 million in new capital funding to further expand availability. A portion of these funds will be accessible to counties and municipalities that wish to undertake child care construction, maintenance, or repair projects. The Budget also makes \$10 million in Federal funds available to help improve the safety and quality of home-based, family child care programs by assisting with the cost of renovations and repairs.

It was an honor to serve alongside my colleague, Commissioner Reardon, as the co-chair of the Governor's Child Care Availability Task Force, which yielded the *Roadmap for Universal Child Care*, which affords concrete recommendations to meet the goal of universality. This year's budget proposal includes the Task Force's recommendation for a substitute pool in the amount of \$3 million, which will allow for child care providers to have access to qualified individuals that can cover classrooms to not jeopardize daily staffing ratios. This pool can also serve as a potential workforce pipeline into the early childhood education field.

In furtherance of the goal for Universal Child Care, this year's Executive Budget includes the creation of the New York Coalition for Child Care, which builds upon the work of the Child Care Availability Task Force and leverages the expertise of business leaders, labor unions, tax and revenue experts, providers, and other stakeholders.

As a New Yorker, I am proud that this year's Executive Budget embodies synergy and innovation across multiple disciplines and systems, making transformational investments that will change the trajectory for many children and families. As Governor Hochul has made clear, we must continue to advance the progress we have made by lending a comprehensive approach to critical services that span the entire spectrum of life, from infancy to adulthood. Under the Governor's leadership, OCFS looks forward to operationalizing this year's budget to ensure that New York is the quintessential state, filled with promise and opportunity.

Thank you for allowing me to speak directly to you today. I welcome your questions and comments.