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Youth, Providers and Advocates from Throughout New York State Head to Albany to Urge Legislators to Strengthen State’s Child Welfare System

To Better Promote Safety, Permanency and Well-being for Children

The State Must Focus on Child Welfare Reforms and Investments

Albany, New York: Over 35 advocates, youth and providers from throughout the State traveled to Albany to urge legislators to make child welfare a priority in the upcoming State Budget and legislative session.

The goals of the child welfare system are to keep children safe and strengthen families. These services include child protective services to assess safety and risk; preventive services to prevent child abuse and neglect so children can remain safely in their homes; and foster care services for children and youth who are found to be unsafe in their homes. This system includes permanency planning for children and youth return home to their families, are adopted, or are cared for permanently by a relative.

Over the past 20 years, there has been progress in New York’s child welfare system. There has been a significant decline in the number of children in foster care, while the number of children and families receiving preventive services has increased. Despite these gains, New York has persistently performed worse than all other states in federal reviews, particularly those focused on permanency. In addition, too many youth age out of foster care without families and the system needs to do a better job of both preventing this and supporting these young people as they transition to adulthood. There have been persistent cuts to preventive and protective services since 2008, as well as cuts to foster care since the creation of KinGAP in 2011.

We are urging the Legislature and the Governor to take 5 key steps this session:
1) Restore the State’s share for preventive and protective services to 65%. The Executive Budget cuts this to 62%. Reinvest the 3% into primary preventive services.
2) Strengthen the child welfare housing subsidy and prevent homelessness by passing A7556A. This bill would increase the subsidy from $300 to $600, allow youth to receive it until age 24, and allow youth to have roommates.
3) Strengthen the $5 million appropriation for post-adoption services by making the appropriation language clear that the money must be for post-permanency services and cannot be decreased.
4) Strengthen subsidized guardianship for relatives (KinGAP) by creating a funding stream, using a consistent definition of relative as with foster care, and provide subsidy until age 21 like foster care and adoption.
5) Enable an additional cohort of foster youth attending college to participate in the Foster Youth Success Initiative by adding $2.6 million.
“New York has a special responsibility to ensure the safety, stability and well-being of its most vulnerable children and families. To meet this responsibility, it should fully fund services proven to help prevent child abuse and neglect before it occurs; programs that strengthen permanency options for kinship families; and subsidies that make housing and higher education affordable for youth in foster care. Smart investments in these programs today will ensure that its most vulnerable children are given the very best chance to grow up to be self-sufficient, and to lead productive and fulfilling lives. We are proud to work with partners from around the state to bring these issues to Albany today,” Kate Breslin, President & CEO, Schuyler Center for Analysis & Advocacy.

“Advocates, providers and youth from across the state are here at the Capital today to ensure legislators know that New York must do more to strengthen and support the most vulnerable children and their families--including children at risk of abuse or neglect, children in foster care, and children and youth discharged from the foster care system. This must include restoring the funding due to be cut for child abuse prevention services, strengthening the laws for relatives permanently caring for children who were in foster care, ensuring funding is available this year and in the future for post-permanency services, providing college supports for foster youth, and preventing family and youth homelessness by increasing the amount and eligible age for housing subsidy,” said Stephanie Gendell, Associate Executive Director for Policy and Government Relations at Citizens’ Committee for Children.

“At Graham Windham, we believe, informed by research and experience, that kids and families must be at the core of every solution. We must invest in lasting solutions which both see kids and families through the toughest moments of their lives and invest their lifelong success. We at Graham are proud to join the voices of advocates, youth and fellow community organizations in calling for a wise investment in lasting solutions that help our families get and remain strong and help our children maximize their enormous potential,” said Jess Dannhauser, CEO and President, Graham Windham.

“It’s absolutely critical that our leaders in Albany do everything they can to support families in the child welfare system,” said Phoebe C. Boyer, president and CEO of The Children’s Aid Society. “We can make New York a better state when we shore up family foundations, whether it’s providing preventive supports as families approach a crisis point or ensuring that adoptive or foster care parents have the resources they need to support children.”

“The children of New York State are our children and we owe them the very best we can provide. Each one of these critical child welfare initiatives can offer a child enhanced safety, security, and hope. We cannot stand by when we have an opportunity to ease the suffering of a child who needs the help that this legislative body has the power to impart,” said Karen J. Freedman, Esq., Executive Director, Lawyers For Children.

“JCCA helps thousands of foster children and families every year. Many of our foster youth who now live on their own, struggle to pay the rent and college tuition. One of our youth recently told us, ‘It is difficult for many foster kids living on their own without a mother or father to turn to. It is hard to put food on the table, pay the rent and also pay for college tuition, books and supplies. No child should have to choose between putting food in the fridge and going to class.’ We strongly urge full funding for the Foster Youth Success Initiative,” said Ronald E. Richter, CEO, JCCA.