Testimony of

Grant Cowles
Senior Policy and Advocacy Associate for Youth Justice

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Oversight:
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Good afternoon. My name is Grant Cowles and I am the Senior Policy and Advocacy Associate for Youth Justice at Citizens’ Committee for Children (CCC). CCC is a 73-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. I would like to thank City Council Finance Chair Julissa Ferreras-Copeland and City Council Youth Services Chair Mathieu Eugene, as well as all of the members of the City Council Finance and Youth Services Committees for holding today’s oversight hearing on the City Fiscal Year 2018 Preliminary Budget. CCC appreciates the opportunity to testify on the Preliminary Budget’s impact on youth services.

CCC is grateful for the City Council’s longstanding commitment to youth services. The Council has been a steadfast ally and partner with regard to protecting and expanding the programs that provide youth with positive social, academic, and work opportunities that ultimately contribute to incalculable benefits for the youth throughout their lives and for the city. This past year, thousands of additional children and youth were able to participate in summer camp programs, elementary after-school programs, the Summer Youth Employment Program and Work, Learn & Grow, because of your commitment to the next generation of New York City’s leaders. The investments the City Council has put into youth services have paid back in hundreds of thousands of youth and adults who have benefitted from these programs and who now form a foundation of our city’s workforce and communities. Our gratitude cannot be overstated.

We also appreciate the investments Mayor de Blasio and DYCD Commissioner Chong have made in youth services over the past three years, including expanding the middle school after-school program, increasing capacity in SYEP, increasing the rate for Beacon community centers, and expanding the number and hours of NYCHA Cornerstone Community Centers.

We were also pleased to see that the City’s Fiscal Year 2018 Preliminary Budget proposed important investments in youth services. Notably, these proposals include adding $6.2 million to create 10 new Beacon Community Centers and adding $9.32 million to add 5,000 SYEP slots. We were also pleased to see that the Preliminary Budget attempts to proactively resolve the summer camp problem we have faced the prior two years by partially restoring the funding ($15 million) for 22,800 middle school students to attend summer camp programs this summer. While we are grateful that this partial restoration will eliminate the anxiety many families faced by not knowing whether they will have access to a summer program and will enable providers to plan ahead for this summer, it is important to note that this funding is not baselined.

CCC hopes to see additional investments and restorations in youth services in the upcoming Executive Budget. CCC respectfully submits the following recommendations for the upcoming Fiscal Year:

1) **Increase Funding for Human Services Providers by 12%**

**CCC urges the administration to address the years of underfunding of human services contracts by increasing funding by 12% to raise salaries, support reasonable fringe benefits, and cover existing under-funding of OTPS.** We also ask the City Council to join the nonprofit and human services community in our efforts to urge the administration to make this investment.
The underfunding of human service contracts impacts youth service programs as they struggle to hire and keep qualified staff while also trying to afford the costs of operating a quality program. This increase will begin to address longstanding financial shortcomings and provide relief for staff and programs that are operating on threadbare budgets.

On average, government contracts pay only about 80 percent of the true program delivery costs for these human services providers. Sixty percent of mid-sized nonprofit human services organizations are in financial distress, meaning they have no more than three months of cash reserves. The City cannot continue to underpay its contractors and expect them to continue to provide high quality programs, when they are operating on a budget deficit. Providing high quality youth services to NYC’s youth and families will require the administration to increase funding for nonprofit providers by at least 12%.

2) **Restore and Baseline all Funding for Summer Camp Programs for Middle School Students**

While CCC appreciates the Administration’s proposal to add $15 million to partially restore summer programming for 22,800 middle school students this summer, we hope to see these summer programs fully funded and baselined in the Executive Budget.

CCC appreciates the City Council’s staunch support for summer camp programs in the past. Indeed, the City Council’s steadfast leadership in fighting for funding for these programs enabled thousands of middle school students to have a safe and stimulating summer experience the past two summers.

Summer programs for middle schoolers are particularly beneficial because they provide positive programming during times when a student may otherwise be unsupervised or in a non-structured environment during the out-of-school summer period. Summer camps also allow parents the opportunity to work and take care of necessary obligations without either taking time off to watch their children, finding or paying for supervision, or leaving their children unsupervised.

Including this funding in the Preliminary Budget allows families to adequately anticipate and plan to utilize these programs instead of having to wait until the last minute to find out if there will be summer programming at all. The providers can likewise begin to plan and arrange for these programs, including hiring staff and performing timely background checks, all of which enhances the ultimate quality of the summer programs. CCC is grateful that we will not need to work with the City Council and our colleagues in the Campaign for Children to organize countless rallies on this issue this year.

CCC strongly believes that there is no reason for these summer programs to be funded for only one year. Prior to this SONYC summer camp issue that arose two years ago, summer programming was always considered a component of the after-school model in New York City. It is critical that we return to this original “out of school time” model.
CCC urges the administration to baseline the $15 million for the 22,800 middle school summer program slots. In addition, we urge the administration to fully restore and baseline summer camp programming for all middle school students in the upcoming Executive Budget.

3) **Restore, Baseline and Expand Elementary After-School Programs and Increase the Rate**

While the administration and DYCD made a tremendous effort to expand middle school after-school programs, there is still a large need to serve more elementary school children. We urge the administration to restore the $16 million of one-year funding for elementary after-school programs from the FY17 Adopted Budget and add funding for at least 10,000 more elementary school children. Furthermore, we urge the administration to ensure all elementary after-school programs are funded at the same rate and that the rate for all elementary after-school programs be increased.

CCC appreciates the City Council’s commitment and support for elementary after-school programs. The Council’s leadership enabled 9,000 elementary school students to participate in COMPASS after-school programming this year. Specifically, in the FY2017 adopted budget, the City Council restored $8 million and the Administration added $8 million, all for just one year. Unfortunately, the Preliminary Budget did not include this funding so again we urge the administration to restore the $16 million in the upcoming Executive Budget. We also urge the administration to build on this investment and the successful middle school expansion by adding at least 10,000 additional elementary after-school slots next year.

After-school programming enables parents to work while their children are safe and participating in academically and developmentally appropriate activities. This is particularly critical for elementary school aged children who are too young to care for themselves.

In addition, there are still two different rates for elementary after-school programs, whereby those programs that had been previously funded by the City Council (before they were baselined at the end of the Bloomberg administration) are funded at a lower rate. These programs are not required to have an educational coordinator. We urge the administration to finally rectify this inequality by adding $8.8 million so all elementary after-school programs can be funded at the same rate and then increase the rate for all elementary after-school programs.

4) **Continue to Expand the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and Work, Learn & Grow and Ensure Rates Address the Minimum Wage Increase**

CCC is pleased that the Preliminary Budget proposes to add $9.32 million for SYEP, which according to the administration would enable an additional 5,000 youth to participate in SYEP (for a total of 65,000). Unfortunately, this increase does not account for the January 2017 minimum wage increase: to serve 65,000 youth this summer at the higher minimum wage, we need an additional $16.2 million for SYEP. We urge the administration to ensure that in the Executive Budget, the funding for SYEP addresses the minimum wage increase.
CCC was a member of the recent Task Force on SYEP and hopes to see a plan soon that will enable SYEP to grow to meet the needs of at least 100,000 youth in a time frame that is workable for the providers. SYEP provides youth with a paid job during the summer period. This benefits youth in many ways, including providing the youth with compensation, basic personal finance skills, workplace experience, vocational skills, career planning opportunities, professional interactions with adults, resume building, and potentially beginning long-term employment with the employer. It also benefits the participating businesses and organizations, as they gain workers who may become full-time staff at low financial risk.

Last summer, after the SYEP lottery was completed, nearly 80,000 youth who applied for SYEP were denied participation due to lack of available capacity. CCC believes that there must be enough capacity for all youth to participate in this valuable program, and not merely those lucky enough to win the lottery. We are nonetheless supportive of the Preliminary Budget proposal to add 5,000 more slots for this summer and look forward to working with the Council, the Administration, DYCD, the providers and the advocates to ensure SYEP can continue to grow in future years.

CCC also appreciates the City Council creating Work, Learn, & Grow as an important component for providing job experience and opportunities to more New York City youth during the school year. **CCC recommends that the $11 million investment in Work, Learn, Grow be restored, baselined, and increased to address the January 2017 minimum wage increase.**

5) **Continue to Strengthen the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) System**

The RHY system provides safe and developmentally appropriate shelter to some of the City’s most vulnerable youth ages 16-21. CCC appreciates the administration’s investment and commitment to increasing Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) shelter beds. We also appreciate the administration’s plans, mentioned in DHS’s 90-day review, to better coordinate services and placements for youth in the RHY system and to make the LINC program available to youth in the RHY system. These are all steps in the right direction, to better meet the needs of these youth.

The State Executive Budget currently includes proposed language that would increase the number of days youth can stay in RHY facilities, and provide counties with the option to expand RHY eligibility to youth up to age 24. Unfortunately, the state budget does not propose adding any resources to address either of these increases in demand. Given that young adults in NYC can benefit tremendously from a shelter system tailored to their developmental needs, if the State budget is adopted in April with the expansion in eligibility, **we urge DSS, DYCD, the Mayor’s Office and the City Council to work collaboratively with advocates to invest in creating RHY-type facilities tailored to serve youth ages 21-24.**

6) **Restore and Baseline City Council Initiatives**

The City Council’s leadership and commitment to youth services has been tremendous; the consistent support has been instrumental to the successes seen through the many highly regarded programs and the tens of thousands of youth who have benefitted.
We are especially appreciative of the programs and services that the City Council funded last year, many of which the Council has a long history of supporting. We hope to see these programs restored and baselined in the upcoming Executive Budget so that there is no need for the annual budget dance.

**With regard to Youth Services, the Council initiatives we hope to see restored and baselined include:**
- $5.425 million for the After-School Enrichment Initiative.
- $250,000 for Anti-Violence Youth Programs.
- $11.22 million total for Cultural After-School Adventure (CASA).
- $500,000 for Civic Education in New York City Schools.
- $1.2 million total for Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City.
- $1.2 million total for Sports Training and Role models for Success Initiative (STARS).
- $400,000 for the Student Voter Registration Day Initiative.
- $2.1 million for the NYC Youth Build Project Initiative.

In conclusion, we greatly appreciate the City Council’s commitment to protecting, supporting, and championing youth services in New York City, as these services provide the support and opportunities that often provide the tangible difference for a youth’s long-term success. We are thankful for the Administration also making several key investments in youth services this year, but hope that the Executive Budget can build upon the worthwhile investments in all these youth services programs with fully restored and baselined funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.