



Leadership, voice and vision for child welfare in New York State

**Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies  
Testimony Presented by Lisa Gitelson, Associate Executive Director  
City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing  
Committee on Justice Justice/Committee on General Welfare  
March 25, 2019**

Good afternoon, Chairpersons King and Levin, I am Lisa Gitelson and I am the Associate Executive Director of the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA). Our member agencies include over fifty not-for-profit organizations providing foster care, adoption, family preservation, and juvenile justice services in New York City and over 100 agencies providing the same services Statewide. On behalf of our member agencies, their thousands of employees, and mostly on behalf of the tens of thousands of children and families that our agencies serve, we thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

As the City engages in this vitally important budget work, it is imperative that the Council know of what is required to in terms of our highest needs youth in order to keep them safe, to therapeutically engage them, to keep staff safe, and to allow us to make change for these families.

Present Challenges to the System

Many of us have seen the very recent NBC story about the challenges at the Children's Center. The agencies providing services to residential youth face these same challenges working with these highest needs youth once they leave the Children's Center and come to our programs.

Our agencies have decades of experience working with very challenging youth and would very much welcome an opportunity to share suggestions as well as brainstorm new ideas to meet the needs of some of these youth. These efforts would be in residential care, family foster care, and perhaps even a new preventive services model.

We see all of this work in partnership with ACS and with the shared goal with ACS to provide the most meaningful services to the most traumatized youth. We do believe that in partnership there exists meaningful opportunity to bring change.

Recommendations

Some of our recommendations include:

1. New Models
  - a. Applying lessons learned from Close To Home model to our Residential Care foster care models where appropriate.
  - b. Consideration of a professional foster parent model for certain youth
  - c. Discussions with Bellevue about how to meaningfully work with our youth and support our models



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- d. Consideration of the appropriate settings for youth both over seventeen and those recently released from incarceration
  - e. The possibility of one or more small closed facilities
  - f. A discussion as to what interventions/therapeutic settings are the best alternatives to incarceration
  - g. Examination of new models for youth with high needs
  - h. Possibility of a grand rounds model at the Children's Center
2. Staffing and Safety Concerns
- a. The need to assure safety in both the Children's center as well as our facilities (we should not be returning youth who have assaulted staff to the same settings)
  - b. How to properly recruit and retain qualified staff, including more reasonable salaries

We implore the City Council to recognize the crisis facing these youth and their families if we are not funded to meaningfully work with them. We are asking the ACS be funded in a manner to support this recognition so that the most at risk youth/families, and those who serve them, will all be safe and receive all of the services that we agree can make change.

I would be happy to answer any questions the Council members may have.

I thank you for allowing me to submit testimony.

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