



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

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO
THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
Hearing Regarding
Oversight: Foster Care Task Force Progress
and Int. No. 148
Tuesday, November 24, 2020

Jim Purcell

CEO

Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies

Good morning, Chairperson Stephen Levin, and good morning to the members of the New York City Council General Welfare Committee. My name is Jim Purcell and I represent the Council of Family and Child Caring agencies, also known as COFCCA. COFCCA represents over fifty New York City child welfare agencies, organizations that provide foster care and child maltreatment prevention services to many thousands of families. Our members range from large multiservice agencies to small community-based preventive services programs in community districts around the city. We thank the Committee for the invitation to testify about the Foster Care Task Force and Introductory bill 148.

Regarding the Task Force, as ACS has outlined in its final report issued in March, the task force made 16 recommendations to improve permanency outcomes; health, mental health, and education services; and outcomes for young adults transitioning from foster care. The contract agencies have been diligently working with ACS on these recommendations, including increasing the number of kinship homes so children in foster care can be placed with relatives. We look forward to a new expansion of the Parent Advocate program, where parents who have experienced child welfare interventions can help other parents advocate for their families and work with staff to achieve better safety and permanency for children. We support Fair Futures and the support



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of Fair Futures coaches, tutors, and other resources for transitioning youth, and are pleased NYS granted youth leaving care the flexibility to have roommates and share housing expenses without risking their Child Welfare Housing Subsidies.

Like so many other plans this year, plans by ACS and the agencies to improve family visits was upended by the pandemic. Foster care programs were forced to reduce face-to-face visits and engineer virtual video visits for many families in the interests of safety and COVID-19 prevention. Virtual visits were not encouraged in any organized fashion in the past and once the parties were able to connect this way, some family members were able to see each other more often, albeit remotely. Post-pandemic, we can see that this experience with remote visiting will be useful as a way to provide families with *additional* opportunities to maintain contact, augmenting instead of replacing the in-person visits. Of course we all hope in-person family visits resume in full measure and frequency, at or above the levels ACS prescribes, as soon as the situation with COVID-19 allows.

Regarding Int. 148, we support any effort at preventing youth homelessness. We must say, first and foremost, that discharging children to families (families of origin, kin or fictive kin, or adoptive parents) should always be the goal for every child in care. For those youth for whom it is not possible or practical, or for whom independent living is the youth's preference, we should be providing every possible support. When we look at young adults from intact families, economically-stable families, families with privileges and advantages, we recognize they continue to need the support and backing of capable, caring adults into their mid-twenties. Youth leaving foster care may not be coming from an advantaged place and should not be cast out of care to "sink or swim." In addition to other transitional supports, rental voucher assistance is very important to keeping former foster youth in stable housing. We encourage the Committee and Council to provide this funding, and ask that consideration also be given to Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY), many of whom face the same family and personal disadvantages as foster youth but without a formal foster care placement.



We at COFCCA would be happy to answer any questions the Council members may have, or to arrange for members to see their local child welfare agencies in action. We thank you for allowing us to submit our testimony.

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Contact Information:

James F. Purcell, CEO

Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies  
254 West 31st Street, Fifth Floor, New York, NY 10001  
Phone: (212) 929-2626 / Fax: (212) 929-0870

[www.cofcca.org](http://www.cofcca.org)