



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

**New York City Council
Committee on Finance
Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Hearing
May 25, 2021**

**Testimony submitted by:
Kathleen Brady-Stepien, President and CEO, COFCCA**

Good morning, Chairperson Dromm and members of City Council Committee on Finance. I am Kathleen Brady-Stepien and I am the President and CEO 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.

Throughout the pandemic, our essential workers have gone out into the field each day to support New York City's children, youth, and families in our prevention services, foster care, and juvenile justice programs. We continue to be concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on our families and communities, which have been some of the hardest-hit throughout the pandemic. We continue to ask for your support in ensuring that our nonprofit agencies are well-supported to build back from the pandemic, and that our children, youth, and families are put front and center in the city's pandemic response during this budget year.

Indirect Cost Rate Funding

The human services sector stepped up to meet the need of New Yorkers in crisis despite the fact we faced a funding crisis long before our City saw its first case of COVID-19. We are so appreciative that the City Council demanded ICR funding in its FY22 Preliminary Budget response. As you know, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the addition of \$57 million to restore the ICR cut in FY21 and baselining the full \$91 million to sustain the program for future years as part of his FY22 Executive Budget! Thank you for championing this critically important issue for our nonprofits! Together, we must ensure this funding makes it into the Adopted Budget.

Investing in the City's Essential Human Services Workforce

We must invest in our essential human services workforce in the FY 2022 budget. It is critical for the Adopted FY22 budget to include restoration of ICR funding as well as the follow core investments in the human services workers:

1. **The restoration of the COLA on the personnel services line of all human services contracts at a rate of 3%, at a cost of \$48 million for FY22.**
2. **A plan for the administration to promote wage equity in the public sector by correcting the pay disparities the human services workforce experience, as outlined in the City Council’s FY22 Preliminary Budget Response.**

Investments in the human services workforce are critical. New York City has suffered a net-loss of over 44,000 human services jobs since last year due to underfunded contracts and compounding cuts at the City and State level. On top of this massive net loss of jobs, City-contracted human services workers, on average, make less than half compared to those outside of the sector with similar credentials and experience. Our workers are invaluable to the health and well-being of the City and they deserve to be compensated fairly.

Underfunding human services contracts come at a direct cost for communities most impacted by COVID-19 due to income inequality, structural racism, and ableism. Our services and workers are invaluable to the health and wellbeing of the City. We join with the voices of the Human Services Council and our nonprofit human services organization partners in advocating to ensure the restoration of ICR funding, COLA for the human services workforce, and a comprehensive plan to promote wage equity in the sector are all included in the FY22 Adopted Budget.

Fair Futures

As you know, the Fair Futures program offers life coaches and tutors to foster youth from middle school to age 26, in all 26 New York City-contracted foster care agencies. The program gives the youth practical and emotional support through stable relationships with adults who follow the youth throughout their time in and after foster care. Fair Futures participants have shown increased rates of high school graduation, among other positive findings. Each year, however, the youth and the programs must come to the City and Mayor to ask for the funds to continue the program. Baseline funding for a proactive program that keeps the City from incurring other costs for negative youth outcomes is a matter of practicality.

We ask the Mayor and City Council to make Fair Futures a permanent fixture in the NYC Budget and baseline \$20M for this important program.

Investing in Support for Students in Foster Care: DOE Office and Bus Transportation

We join in with our partners, Advocates for Children of New York, and many other organizations in urging the city to invest in support for students in foster care by providing funding in the Fiscal Year 2022 budget for the following initiatives:

1. **Establish a Department of Education (DOE) Office for Students in Foster Care (\$1.5M)**
2. **Provide Bus Transportation for Students in Foster Care (\$5M)**

At a time when the Department of Education (DOE) is receiving a historic influx of state and federal funding, we need to ensure that this increased funding will support students in foster care. The educational needs of students in foster care raise issues of justice and equity that

cannot continue to be overlooked. In March 2018, the City’s Interagency Foster Care Task Force recommended that the DOE establish an infrastructure to focus on students in foster care that would “oversee and advise a team of borough-based foster care content experts” who would be responsible for providing schools with case consultation and professional development regarding students in foster care, filling a gap that has long existed. That gap continues to exist. As the City determines how to budget the historic amount of funding the DOE is receiving, we again urge that these critically important investments for focusing on the needs of students in foster care and the door-to-door transportation for students in foster care be provided, to continue to provide their educational stability.

Expansion of Family Enrichment Centers

We thank the City Council for your support and interest in the Family Enrichment Centers, or FECs. We seek to bolster the availability of primary prevention, services and supports available to all families in a given area categorically, without the intervention of the child welfare system. We are proud of our providers, Children’s Village (Bridge Builders), Graham Windham, and Good Shepherd Services for their work alongside families in their communities, to build up supportive places for communities to build together and thrive together. These FECs are a place for families to connect, and to share resources and activities together. Ultimately, they are a measure to reduce families’ interaction with the child welfare system by building community supports from within. A recent evaluation study conducted in March 2020 of the FECs has found that families report the FEC assisting them with housing, educational assistance (for themselves or for their child/children), financial management, and assistance with finding jobs/careers.ⁱ Providing these essential supports for communities has only become more important given the pandemic, which is why we were so pleased to see the Mayor’s announcement earlier this month, announcing the expansion of FECs from the current three sites to 30 over the next four years! We are very pleased with this announcement, especially given the recognition for siting the FECs in priority neighborhoods hardest hit by the pandemic. We applaud the Mayor, the Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity, and ACS for the partnership in building up these FECs. Thank you to the City Council for all of your support of the FECs!

Thank you to the Council members for allowing me to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions that you have. We truly appreciate your partnership and support for our children, families, and providers.

Contact Information:

Kathleen Brady-Stepien, CEO
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies
254 West 31st Street, Fifth Floor, New York, NY 10001
Phone: (212) 929-2626
kbradystepien@cofcca.org

ⁱ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/about/2020/FECEvaluationReport.pdf>