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NEW YORK STATE, DIVISION OF THE BUDGET HEARING  
HAUPPAUGE, NEW YORK**

On behalf of the Nassau County Youth Board, I want to thank the NYS Division of the Budget for this opportunity to present our views about the importance and efficacy of positive youth, family and community development in our region and throughout New York State. As we move into 2008, there is a necessity for continued and enhanced resources to address the growing and complex needs of youth, families and communities.

We are part of an Association of Youth Bureaus, 200 members strong and representing over 105 Youth Bureaus and Boards, not-for-profit youth development organizations and municipalities. We represent the voices of over 5.2 million children and youth and do so with renewed commitment and expanded vision.

In 1965, the Youth Bureau system was written into Executive Law to establish an equitable partnership between New York State (the then Division for Youth) and local municipalities to proactively plan for and respond to identified needs of youth, families and communities. The significance of this vision cannot be overstated. The commitment, accountability and responsibility of developing our young people must be shared as we continue to address this awesome task. In the early 1990's this equity became imbalanced, leaving municipalities with the dubious task of maintaining and developing these resources and opportunities. I submit to you that this partnership must be renewed. Key is the return of State Aid through Youth Development Delinquency Prevention (YDDP) to the original intent of the Law, \$6.50 per child, to move forward. Further, we must enlist the assistance of New York State in advocating for federal legislation and funding (i.e. Younger Americans Act) that will highlight the importance of positive youth development and provide resources, nationally, to support this agenda.

***Youth Development is a term all of us are hearing a great deal about.*** It is a philosophy or approach that guides communities in the way they organize programs, supports and opportunities so that young people can develop to their full potential

while fostering a life plan. Key to positive youth development is cultivating youth assets – internal and external tools for growth and development. According to Search Institute, the proven value of youth development extends further. Surveys administered to 150,000 students in grades 6-12 revealed that assets are powerful influences on adolescent behavior. Regardless of gender, ethnic heritage, economic situation, or geographic location, assets promote positive behaviors and attitudes and help protect young people from many different problem behaviors. In other words, young people with more assets are less likely to engage in patterns of high-risk behaviors that are more costly to address. Positive Youth Development **also** means directly addressing and intervening in issues our youth experience every day – juvenile justice; HIV/AIDS and Teenage Pregnancy; poverty; homelessness; violence and gangs; family conflict; employability and the like. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IS RISK REDUCTION and failure is far more expensive than success.

Locally, the efficacy of positive youth development has been researched and affirmed. The Youth Board completed the *“Youth and Family Needs in Nassau County: Assets and Challenges at the End of the Millennium”*. It was the first social-action research project undertaken in the region to improve Nassau County’s understanding of youth and family needs and assets and translate this knowledge into planning, funding and program development. This Survey is based upon a comprehensive random telephone survey of 586 parents, youth and grandparents conducted by Youth Board staff and volunteers in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole. It covered six basic areas of respondent knowledge or opinions: resident knowledge of and participation in community after-school programs; respondent’s assessment of the quality of community life (safety, race and ethnic relations); and, parental support for education. Participants were asked to describe the personal attributes of youth. The survey also focused on “risk factors” - behavioral, health risks, and some environmental. Among the many findings revealed was that:

- ❑ *youth with higher levels of self-esteem, leadership, conflict resolution and planning skills are less depressed and have lower rates of virtually every high risk behavior respondents were asked about. These assets help youth succeed in school and transition into healthy adulthood;*
- ❑ *Youth involvement in community based services helps youth avoid a wide variety of problems during adolescence ranging from violence, depression and drugs to shoplifting and possession of a weapon..*

In Nassau County, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Youth Development Delinquency Prevention (YDDP), Special Delinquency Prevention (SDPP) and Runaway Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) funding supports an incredible network of community-based resources that serve youth and families in a most effective way. Providing services strategically where people live maximizes accessibility and utilization. It also allows organizations to proactively and effectively align services with neighborhood issues. *Services are available to all youth as risk factors and behaviors transcend geographic, ethnic and socio-economic boundaries.*

In Nassau, services are provided through a network of 44 contract agencies strategically located in communities of greatest need and include: after-school programs, youth violence and gang prevention/intervention, runaway/homeless youth services, juvenile justice programs, teen pregnancy/HIV/AIDS education and risk reduction, individual and family counseling, Limited English Proficiency services, summer programs, youth leadership and community service learning, employability skills development, mentoring and special events. Annually, over 35,000 youth and their families are served.

Nassau is similar to other counties as REAL needs extend well beyond the resources and opportunities we can provide alone:

- Nassau has three towns, two cities, 64 incorporated villages, 70 unincorporated hamlets and 57 school districts. In 2007, the county population is 1,387,355 and the youth population 0-21 was 383,730 (an increase of 45,000 over the 1990 census).
- ***The County has the fourth highest number of children in NYS.*** The 15-19 year old population has grown more than other age groups since 1990. Between 1990 and 2007, this number has increased by 17,545 or 21%.
- According to the *Long Island Index* (2007), Rauch Foundation, Long Island's economy continues to grow but shows signs of weakness:
  - From 1996 to 2005, among the approximately 1,000,000 households on Long Island, the top 10% earn a total income that is about equal to the total income earned by the bottom 60% of the households.
- Dr. Pearl Kamer, economist for the L.I. Association, projected that if the high cost of housing and utilities were factored into the poverty rate, an additional 15% of the population would fall below poverty.
- Our region is faced with emerging issues related to diverse and growing ethnic and cultural populations. According to a 2007 report issued by the Horace Hagedorn Foundation, "the Long Island Hispanic population tripled to nearly 330,000 residents since 1980 and now represents approximately 12 percent of the general population - well beyond the national growth of 183% for that same period of time". Hispanic children account for 12.6% of the total school enrollment. Further, according to the NYS Department of Education, there are an estimated 25,000 students on Long Island classified as "Limited English Proficient" with over 77 languages spoken.
- Youth violence has manifested itself in many ways. Best estimates put gang membership at 3,000-5,000 in more than 42 gangs in Nassau County with as many or more in Suffolk. In 2003, there were 1,685 indicated reports of child

abuse or 30% of all reports. This is a significant increase of indicated reports over time. In 2002, there were 5,000 Family Offense Petitions and 1,269 PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision) assigned at Family Court Intake.

- The Nassau County Health Department reports that between 1981 and 2000, 3,127 residents of the county have been diagnosed with AIDS and 1,882 people have died from the disease. The HIV/AIDS virus is a growing cause of death among persons between the ages of 25 and 44. Given youth's greater experimentation with drugs and sex and the incubation period, youth remain at high risk.
- Youth Board estimates that a minimum of 4,000 youth runaway each year in Nassau County. Intake data in 2006 revealed that of the 635 adolescents served.
  - 89% experienced significant problems in their families including abuse, neglect and economic strife
  - 54% had either Juvenile or Family Court involvement
  - 25% reported physical or sexual abuse
  - 54% reported they were abused or neglected by a parent or guardian
  - 29% were involved in multiple service systems i.e. Social Services, Mental Health and Probation

***To meet these needs and develop strong youth and communities throughout New York State, the NYS Office of Children and Family Services budget for 2008/09 must minimally reflect the following:***

- **Youth Development Delinquency Prevention (YDDP)** the current funding level of \$29,472,000 must be changed to \$36,626,800 in the 2008 state budget to stabilize this program and allow municipalities to address the growing and complex needs of children, youth and families locally.
- **Special Delinquency Prevention Programs (SDPP)** funding level of \$9,379,000 must be changed to \$9,659,000 in the 2008 state budget to add a 3% Cost of Living Adjustment to the SDPP funding to allow contracts to be adjusted to meet increasing operational costs and address the minimum wage increase. Moreover, funding is sorely needed to allow municipalities to expand resources and services to vulnerable youth populations.
- **Runaway/Homeless Youth Act: (RHYA)** funding level of \$6,814,000 must be changed to \$7,314,000 in the 2008 state budget to both expand funding for new initiatives and give additional aid to existing programs. ***The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act services have been in demand as communities refer potential persons in need of supervision (PINS) youth to alternative crisis***

***intervention and respite services at RHYA funded programs. Providers must also prepare to meet the demand for new services and service expansion.***

- **Advantage After-School Funding:** The Advantage After-School Program will receive \$28,200,000 in the upcoming fiscal year to be distributed through contracts between OCFS and over 190 sites. **Support and expand this important funding stream.**
- ***Youth Employment:*** Summer has historically offered youth opportunities to gain the necessary skills to join the workforce. Today, these opportunities have dwindled to a point where many youth are left with no experience when they transition to the adult work world. To respond to the demand, the 2007 allocation of \$35 million must be maintained into 2008. *In addition to summer employment activities, additional funds must be allocated to support year-round employability skills development, career exploration and job placement with young people currently available through YDDP and SDPP funding allocations.*

The system of Youth Bureaus has evolved well beyond coordinators of services and has developed comprehensive infrastructures to forecast needs, administer and evaluate programs, measure outcomes and enhanced accountability that exceeds the responsibilities contemplated by current funding streams. In closing, I thank you for this opportunity and look forward toward building a more equitable partnership with New York State and strategic alliances with the Federal government on behalf of children, youth and communities.