

COALITION OF NASSAU YOUTH SERVICE AGENCIES
~Testimony~
NEW YORK STATE DIVISION OF THE BUDGET PUBLIC HEARINGS
NOVEMBER 30, 2007

My name is Peter Levy. I am the President of the Nassau County Coalition of Youth Service Agencies, Inc. I would like to thank the Division of the Budget for the opportunity to present our perspective. The Coalition was established in 1996 with one goal in mind: to better serve youth and families living in Nassau County who may be struggling with a wide range of issues. Working together has made us stronger. Through this Coalition we are able to develop, preserve and expand youth and family development and the quality of life for our residents.

I am here to underscore the importance and value of neighborhood-based service delivery supported by the YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, DELINQUENCY PREVENTION (YDDP); SPECIAL DELINQUENCY PREVENTION (SDPP); and RUNAWAY HOMELESS YOUTH SERVICE ACT (RHYA) funding available through the New York State Office of Children and Family Services and the critical need to expand these resources.

The Youth and Family Development Network, contracted through the Nassau County Youth Board and Youth Bureaus across the state represent the first line of prevention and intervention for youth and families. The philosophy dictates that services are: proactive vs. reactive; teaching vs. treating; inclusive vs. exclusive; developed with the community rather than imposed and focused on assets of people and their communities as opposed to their deficiencies.

The Youth and Family Development Network is a partnership between the State, County government and the broader community; allowing public dollars to be used in a cost-efficient manner to directly respond to community-defined needs.

Family and Youth Development Services provide a neighborhood "safety net" and direct access to a variety of systems and opportunities for youth and families throughout Nassau County. Programs span from prevention to intervention services and include: structured after-school programs, individual and family counseling, limited-English proficiency, 24-hour crisis intervention, Runaway/Homeless Youth Services, Juvenile Justice, Violence and Gang Prevention/Intervention, Youth Leadership, educational opportunities, employability skills, cultural enrichment and family support. Annually, tens of thousands of youth and their families are served.

Residents across New York State and taxpayers support neighborhood youth development agencies. Locally, our residents (educators, lawyers, social workers, accountants, etc.) provide more than two million dollars of volunteer services annually.

The strength and effectiveness of our Youth Development network is that we:

- Are Neighborhood-Based, therefore are reflective of and proactive in addressing community needs;
- Have well Established Community Relationships;
- Are Cost Effective and Proactive – Can adapt more readily to community needs than broader bureaucracies;
- Are a magnet – for local, Federal and private funding. As an established and experienced neighborhood-based network, a solid foundation and infrastructures are in place for new program areas; and,
- Have time-honored relationships within communities - the vast amount of agencies have been in existence *over 25 years* and have evolved in new areas of programming as needs are identified.

As was or will be noted by our Youth Board, the needs of our region well exceed State resources available and we can no longer compensate for this alone. We call upon the State to renew its commitment to youth, families and communities in the following manners:

- **Increase Youth Development Delinquency Prevention (YDDP) funding level of \$29,472,000 to \$36,626,800 in the next state budget to stabilize this program and allow municipalities to address the growing and complex needs of children, youth and families locally. *Fully fund the statutory formula of \$6.50 per capita/per youth to bring this statewide funding stream to \$36,626,000 which includes the formula, plus a 3% COLA.*** The Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention Program (YDDP) was established as a state/local funding and oversight partnership through statute. With the not-withstanding clause instituted in the early 1990's, the \$6.50 statutory per cap formula has not been fully allocated, nor have COLAs been incorporated. A budget should be proposed that ties the per capita rate to an annual inflation factor. Declining funds and lack of cost of living adjustments for contract agencies have left youth service providers with unmet need for technology upgrades, inability to fully staff programs and deficits in other operational costs incurred.

- **Increase Special Delinquency Prevention Programs (SDPP)** funding level of \$9,379,000 to \$9,659,000 in the next 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 in this stream to allow municipalities to expand resources and services to vulnerable youth population. This funding stream has virtually been flat for several years.

- **Increase Runaway/Homeless Youth Act:** (RHYA) funding level of \$6,814,000 to \$7,314,000 in the next state budget to both expand funding for new initiatives and give additional aid to existing programs. The RHYA aid has been virtually flat since 1989.

- **Advantage After-School Funding:** The Advantage After-School Program will receive \$28,200,000 in the upcoming fiscal year to be distributed through direct contracts between OCFS and over 190 sites. You should support the continuation and enhancement of 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 current allocation of \$35 million must be maintained in future budgets. 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.

Developing strong youth and communities is good economic development and your continued and enhanced support is warranted. Thank you for this opportunity.