



Testimony of

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Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC) is a 64- year old independent child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every child in New York is healthy, housed, educated and safe. We thank the Division of Budget for holding Town Hall meetings and accepting written testimony in preparation for the State's 2008-2009 Executive Budget. Given that this will be a difficult budget year, we think that it is imperative that the Division of Budget and the Governor's Office are aware of the most critical issues facing children and families in New York State and that these items are addressed in the Executive Budget.

Keeping Children Safe:

- **Family Court Judges:**

New York's most vulnerable children depend on the State's Family Courts to make the most important decisions in their lives- where they will live, who will raise them, what services they will need, and how and when they will visit their parents and siblings. Yet as Chief Judge Judith Kaye explained in her 2007 State of the Judiciary Address, New York's Family Courts are "desperately short of judicial resources."

There has been a 147% increase in new child abuse and neglect cases filed in New York City and the 2005 Permanency Law requires twice as many permanency hearings for each child protective case. New York City has been arbitrarily limited to 47 Family Court Judges by statute since 1991- this must be rectified.

- **Child Welfare Financing**

New York's child welfare financing structure helps keep children safe by providing counties with uncapped 65/35 state/county reimbursement for child protective, preventive, independent living and adoption services. It is this funding stream that enables counties to take the steps necessary to protect children and strengthen families. For example, in New York City, this funding stream has enabled the City's Administration for Children's Services to hire enough child protective caseworkers so that caseloads are manageable and to expand the number of families that can be served in preventive service programs.

Without these uncapped 65/35 resources, counties like New York City could not afford to put in place these critical measures. We ask that this funding mechanism remain in place this budgetary year and that it not take another tragedy to remind us that the counties must have the resources to protect children and strengthen families.

Preparing Young Children for Academic and Social Success

- **Child Care**

The desire to serve as many income eligible children as possible and the recognition that the quality of care is critical, often leads to a tension between enhancing quality and serving more children and families, especially during difficult budget times. This tension is real but the choice between quality and capacity is a false choice-- New York needs an early care and education system that supports both quality and expanded access.

In New York City, less than 30% of income eligible children are being served by the city's subsidized child care system. While reaching thousands more children eligible for subsidized child care would be ideal, the Child Care Block Grant continues to support fewer and fewer children each year because the cost of providing child care continues to increase while the overall Child Care Block Grant has not increased. In October 2007, that State released increased market rates without increasing funding. In addition, Governor Spitzer signed an Executive Order allowing the unionization of family child care providers. The only way counties could meet these new requirements without additional funding would be to serve fewer children.

In New York City the child care budget situation is particularly bleak. Despite a total child care budget of \$722.5 million, of which \$444 million is federal, \$255 million is local and \$23 million is state, the City's Administration for Children's Services is anticipating a shortfall that is over \$80 million. We urge you to increase the funding for the Child Care Block Grant to enable counties to stabilize this critical component of the early care and education system.

- **Universal Pre-Kindergarten:**

CCC applauds the Governor's commitment to Universal Pre-Kindergarten and ensuring that every 4-year old in the State has access to a high quality UPK program. The additional \$146 million allocated last year has benefited thousands more 4-year olds this past year.

As counties make tremendous strides in implementing this program, it is critical that there be more flexibility in the use of the State funding. Specifically, counties need to be able to use the money to also provide half and full day UPK for 4-year olds, ½ day UPK for 3-year olds, transportation services, capital and start-up costs.

Health and Well-Being:

- **Medicaid Reform**

CCC also supports the Governor's efforts to rationalize statewide payments to hospitals, nursing homes and other services, and ensure that safety net hospitals and clinics remain fiscally viable.

- **Universal Health Care Coverage**

CCC supports efforts to ensure CHIP enrollment of the 330,000 currently eligible yet not enrolled children as well as coverage for the additional 70,000 children for whom the state committed to covering last year.

- **Seamless health care coverage for foster children aging out**

As permitted by the federal government, New York State should enable seamless medical coverage for foster youth ages 18-21 who age out of foster care by amending Social Services Law Sections 366 and 368-a to provide automatic Medicaid eligibility to youth aging out of foster care before their 21st birthdays.

- **Access to Healthy and Affordable Food**

Healthy eating is not solely a matter of personal responsibility or individual taste; it is also a matter of making healthy, affordable food accessible and available. New York needs to take steps to ensure that children, particularly low income children, have access to healthy and affordable food. Legislation should be enacted that helps New York State farmers finance the transportation and distribution of their fresh produce to food services markets in underserved communities throughout the state. In addition, the state should enact legislation that promotes the use of healthier foods in schools, child care settings, Head Start, after school and summer programs.

Conclusion

- Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to help shape the Executive Budget. We understand that this year's budget will present challenges as the Executive and Legislative Branches make tough choices amongst many priorities. We ask that special attention be paid to the needs of children. Notably, Family Court Judges, child welfare services, child care, Universal Pre-Kindergarten and children's health coverage are non-negotiable issues.

Thank you.