

THE CHILDREN'S AGENDA

THE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED 2007 MONROE COUNTY BUDGET ON CHILDREN

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The Children's Agenda is independent, non-partisan and promotes evidence-based change for the health and well-being of children in Monroe County. For the fifth consecutive year, The Children's Agenda has conducted an analysis of the proposed Monroe County budget.

KEY FINDINGS

The proposed budget maintains essential income supports and health benefits for children and their families and services that assure child safety and development. The current County administration has continued its track record of commitment to children and collaboration with others concerned about the well-being of children in the community. However, we have concerns and important findings to address.

FINDING: Over Reliance on Ineffective and Expensive Foster Care

Budgeted to rise by a combined total of \$14 Million, the Child Welfare and Adolescent Care programs are providing costly out of home foster care placements to children. This is a problem for two reasons: there is ample evidence that placements are *less effective* than home and community-based services for most families. Further, home and community based services are *less expensive* than using placements.

Foster care is now *the highest cost children's service* in the County budget, exceeding by almost \$10 Million the entire Family Assistance budget and more than double the cost of children's Medicaid coverage:

- With 1,700 children served each year, foster care is also our *most costly service per child*, at an average of \$35,000 per child per year.
- Rates and costs of child placement in Monroe County are *among the highest in New York State*. National and State child welfare policies discourage placements as less effective than home and community based services. Many other communities have reduced placements substantially to the benefit of families, children, and taxpayers.

In the proposed 2007 budget, the County has added and expanded preventive, evidence-based programs. These new preventive additions are an impressive start at both early prevention with younger families and effective remediation of adolescent behavior problems.

RECOMMENDATION: Reduce Foster Care Placements

We strongly recommend the County consider two other elements that have proven critical to the success of placement reduction efforts in other communities:

- A clearly articulated **policy** from County leadership that requires flexible and energetic efforts to resolve family problems in the community and use placement as a last resort when all other efforts have failed, and
- A **monitoring/evaluation** plan affording continuous review of service effects on families and placement numbers and agile retargeting, retooling or replacing of programs if they are not getting results.

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FINDING:
Funding for Evidence-Based, Preventive Programs Increased

Preventive Services in the Department of Human Services budget increases \$6.9 Million for 2007. The bulk of new or expanded services are targeted at reducing the now \$60 Million annual County cost for foster care:

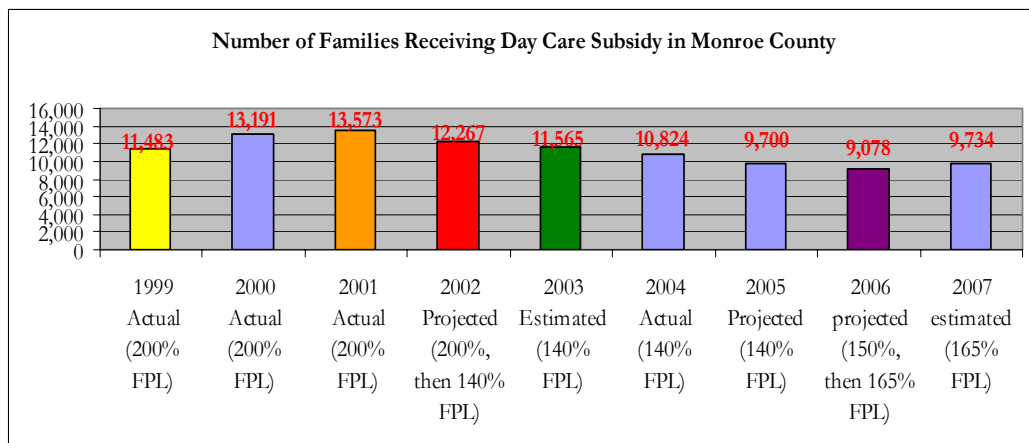
- \$2.1 Million is added for new or expanded services to prevent child abuse and neglect and associated foster care placements, including the Nurse Family Partnership Program and a **new primary/secondary child abuse/neglect prevention initiative**, both which target poor, young families at risk for child abuse/neglect and both use *evidence-based* services. These programs include donated funds from private funding sources.
- Cayuga Homes' Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT), two evidence based programs, receive additional funding to help troubled teens and families needing intensive assistance (\$550,000).
- \$2.7 Million in increased funding supports new and expanded programming for PINS youth, children and youth with PINS-like behaviors, and their families. The cornerstone of stepped-up youth services is a fundamental redesign of the County's PINS service system.

RECOMMENDATION:
Continue This Commitment

We commend the county for continuing to appropriate dollars for preventive, evidence-based programming: this is an important strategy to reduce overall Foster Care Caseloads and we recommend a continued investment in *evidence-based*, preventive programming.

FINDING:
Day Care Subsidies Underutilized

A large budget change is a decrease of \$3.1 Million in the Day Care subsidy budget. Despite the high value of child care aid to families, children, and the community, the Day Care budget account is reduced for a second year; County officials cite underutilization for the decrease. This is perplexing because demographics underlying subsidy need have not altered in recent years. Local child poverty remains high as does the number of low income, single working parents. *Research has repeatedly shown that high quality care changes the life trajectory of children living in low income families: they perform better in school, are more likely to graduate, and are less likely to become involved in the criminal justice system.*



Subsidies offer sorely needed and much welcomed financial aid for parents trying to keep children in safe, consistent, high quality care on very tight budgets.

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RECOMMENDATION: ***Actively plan and implement a policy that provides access to high quality child care for low income children.*** County DHS leadership is committed to examine the causes of subsidy underutilization in cooperation with child care providers and advocates. We commend this strategy, but we recommend that it is coupled with a commitment to actively plan and implement policy that provides access to high quality child care for low income children. This is an evidence-based approach – children from low income families attending high quality child care – that we are not fully taking advantage of.

FINDING: ***Insufficient Child Protective Staff*** Child Protective reports have risen by 14% since 2003 when the last complement of staff was added in this area. *CPS Investigation staffing does not appear to have kept pace with this workload increase, undercutting investigation quality, and most alarming, potentially compromising child safety.*

RECOMMENDATION: ***Add a CPS Investigation Team*** While we are aware that the new leadership team at DHS has begun to assess resource needs through out Family and Children's Services, the proposed budget for this account does not address continuing concerns regarding the adequacy of Child Protective Investigation resources. We recommended that this issue be addressed in our last budget analysis. We now recommend that CPS add an Investigation Team to its staffing immediately.