

Executive Summary: The Children's Agenda
Analysis and Recommendations Regarding the Proposed
2006 Monroe County Budget's Impact on Children

The Children's Agenda is an independent, non-partisan organization working to ensure that local policies improve the well-being of children in Monroe County. For the fourth consecutive year, The Children's Agenda has conducted an analysis of the proposed Monroe County budget.

Overall, the 2006 proposed Monroe County budget is a balanced, smart budget. However, the future of service provision for children is uncertain given the cumulative budget deficit of \$102.3 million predicted for 2007 and 2008. More immediately, Child Protective reports have risen without a commensurate rise in resources or staff. Also, the eligibility level for daycare subsidies has risen, but not to the level appropriate for the funding that is available.

Changes in Total Spending and Spending on Children's Services

- The 2006 proposed budget for Monroe County is \$998.9 million, a \$16.6 million increase (1.7%) over the 2005 adopted budget. The Children's Agenda analysis projects a budget of \$1.01 billion to include grants assumed to be funded at 2005 levels.
- There are 24 County operating departments, and 9 of them provide direct or indirect services to children. From the amended 2004 budget to the proposed 2006 budget there is virtually zero growth; however there is a slight growth of 1.2% in children's services over the two years. Local spending (County sources only) on children's services actually decreased 4.9% during this two year time period.
- From the amended 2005 budget to the proposed 2006 budget the majority of County departments experienced slight decreases or no increases in total spending. The total for all departments was a decrease of 0.8% compared to children's services which increased 7.2%. Local spending (County sources only) on children's services increased 5.6% for this year.

Impact of Budget on Overall Children's Services

- In a difficult fiscal environment, a combination of one time only dollars, increased revenues from state and federal sources and County tax dollars will be used to assure that children's needs are not compromised.
- No children's services are reduced or eliminated in the 2006 budget proposal.
- The future of funding for children's services is uncertain as the multi-year budget forecast predicts a cumulative budget deficit of \$102.3 million for 2007 and 2008.

Impact of Budget on Specific Children's Services

- The budget proposes significant expansion or improvement of County children's services in six program areas. Expansions include two new preventive programs, Nurse Home Visitation and Cayuga Homes Multisystemic Therapy, and funding of more daycare subsidies for low income working families. The budget makes permanent a large preventive contract for Catholic Family Center and expands the Hillside Work Scholarship Program. The County will undertake a multi-year redesign of children's mental health services.

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- The proposed budget continues support for essential income supports and health benefits for children and their families (Family Assistance/TANF, Safety Net and Medicaid/Child Health Plus, Public Health) and for services that assure child safety and development (Foster Care and Special Services for Children).
- The balance of County children's programs and services reviewed in the 9 operating departments (Youth Bureau, Law, Public Safety, Sheriff, Cultural and Educational Services, Public Defender: Family Court section, District Attorney: Child Abuse section, Parks) are maintained at current levels or show small scale increases or decreases for 2006.

Recommendations

The Children's Agenda identified two immediate concerns for children in the 2006 proposed Monroe County budget:

- 1) Child Protective reports have increased 14% since 2003 and are expected to reach almost 7,000 reports of child abuse and neglect in 2005. Child Protective Services Investigation staffing has not kept pace with this workload increase, potentially undercutting investigation quality and compromising child safety.

The Children's Agenda recommends that the County Legislature and Administration create a plan within 90 days to attain sufficient Child Protective staff to address all reports of child abuse and neglect.

- 2) The County proposes to expand eligibility for daycare subsidies for low income working parents from 140% to 150% of the Federal Poverty Level, to serve an additional 155 children. However, available surplus dollars from the Child Care Block Grant could help more children get high quality daycare now.

The Children's Agenda recommends increasing the eligibility level for low income working parents to 160% of the Federal Poverty Level, to serve an estimated 255 more children.

The Children's Agenda is also making the following recommendation to protect the long-term interests of children in Monroe County:

- 3) **The Children's Agenda recommends that the County create a task force for children and families, comprised of community leaders and service providers, to develop a plan to avoid severe consequences of the 2007 budget deficit. This will include the use of research-based, effective programs for children that can save dollars for the County in the future.**