

# Review of the Proposed 2012 Monroe County Budget



11/30/2011

**CONCERNS, COMMENDATIONS, AND  
FURTHER CONVERSATIONS NEEDED  
FOR CLARITY AND CONSENSUS**

Prepared by



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# Review of the Proposed 2012 Monroe County Budget

## CONCERNS, COMMENDATIONS, AND CONVERSATIONS DECEMBER 2011

The Children's Agenda is pleased to present this analysis of the proposed 2012 Monroe County budget, our tenth such annual review. The analysis looks at all sections of the budget where expenditures affect the health and well-being of children in Monroe County and identifies those areas in which County resources are serving children well and those in which additional resources, financial or otherwise, are needed. This document summarizes our major findings in three areas:

- 1) Concerns and recommendations regarding children's issues;
- 2) Commendations for positive County actions;
- 3) Further conversations needed to reach clarity and consensus on approaches and solutions.

In today's tight economy, Monroe County has had to make some difficult choices about funding for children's programs. We commend County leadership for holding steady on some critical programs and building inter-departmental partnerships that have resulted in positive outcomes for kids. We are concerned, however, about the decreasing ability of the Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau to strengthen our community's capacity for positive youth development, and we are seriously troubled by the proposed cuts for runaway and homeless youth. Based on this, we have 7 conclusions:

- 1) We strongly recommend that the County allocate \$116K to maintain services to runaway and homeless youth to ensure that some of our most vulnerable youth do not fall through the ever widening holes of our safety net.
- 2) We understand that the County, in light of state reductions, has initiated internal conversations about how to structure responsibilities for youth development to preserve important functions of the Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau. We applaud this proactive approach and suggest involving agencies in the community by pulling together a small County-Community team.
- 3) The Children's Agenda commends the County for making the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) and Building Healthy Children (BHC) priorities by holding their 2012 funding and services steady. To continue on this successful path, we ask the County to formally commit in a policy statement in 2012 to bring NFP up to full capacity by 2015.
- 4) The Children's Agenda commends the County for its continued investment in child care. Given, though, the huge losses of children served by child care subsidies in our community, we offer to actively advocate with the County for increased investment of State and Federal dollars for child care to ensure that we are best supporting working-poor families and their children.
- 5) Important cross-departmental work has been done to reduce the number of older youth in group and institutional foster care. We applaud the successful multi-year downward trend this has achieved.

- 6) We recommend that the County, including both the Department of Human Services and the Department of Public Health, work with the City and continue to participate in the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning to ensure that there will be no decrease in the number of homes with lead hazards that are identified, thus placing no additional children at risk.
- 7) We raise a concern about the possible impact of state-driven reductions to the reimbursement rate for Early Intervention Providers. To increase understanding and advance the community dialogue about early intervention services for children with special needs, we recommend that the County and providers create an estimate of the *impact on children* from state-driven rate reductions.

## Concerns

### Runaway and Homeless Youth

The Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau coordinates efforts to serve runaway and homeless youth, which includes contracts with local providers who offer both shelter and wrap around care for troubled kids. These Youth Bureau services have been cut 25 percent in the 2012 proposed budget and 47 percent over the past two years (from 1,550 children and youth served in 2010 to a projected 871 in 2012).

These decreases are driven by reductions in State funding. Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) dollars provide street outreach and beds in shelters for runaway and homeless youth. Unfortunately, the need for these services is increasing – both the number of children in need of help and the amount of time they need support are on the rise. Nationally, the numbers of public school children who were homeless increased 41% between the 2006-07 school year and the 2008-09 school year.

Ultimately, the best solution to these problems is prevention through strengthening families, education, and health. Unfortunately, though, there will sometimes be children who fall through the cracks, making a social safety net an imperative. Not only must we support children proactively by building into the community the supports and services all children need, but we must ensure that our most vulnerable, our most needy with the fewest resources, have a safe place to go in times of crisis. **We are very concerned about these proposed cuts. It is shocking to us that this is an area in which New York State would choose to make cuts; we advocated with state officials about this last year to address the needs of these youth and we pledge to continue to advocate together with partners in the community and across the state to see this remedied. In the meantime, we strongly recommend that the County use local tax dollars to maintain services to runaway and homeless youth; the allocation in the Youth Bureau budget for Runaway and Homeless Youth is decreased this year by \$116K (\$387.7Kk to \$271.7K). We request that the County allocate \$116K to ensure that some of our most vulnerable youth do not fall through the ever widening holes of our 'safety net'.**

### Positive Youth Development

The Greater Rochester community faces tremendous challenges that affect children individually and the community at large. Gang involvement starts at the age of 13 on average. Violence among youth has serious consequences. More Rochester teens die from homicide than any other cause. Programs that promote positive youth development can help decrease violence, deter juvenile delinquency, decrease teen pregnancy, and increase graduation rates. This is an area where prevention works and investing in what is effective is critical.

Repeated cuts by the State have severely impacted the Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau's capacity to support positive youth development in the community. In the last four years, state support to the Youth Bureau

has been cut 82%. This year, the allocation for the Youth Bureau in the Monroe County budget is down by 29 percent: \$2.1M in 2011 to the proposed \$1.5M in 2012. The number of children served is projected to fall 25 percent since last year, and 44 percent in the past two years (33.7K in 2010 to a projected 18.9K).

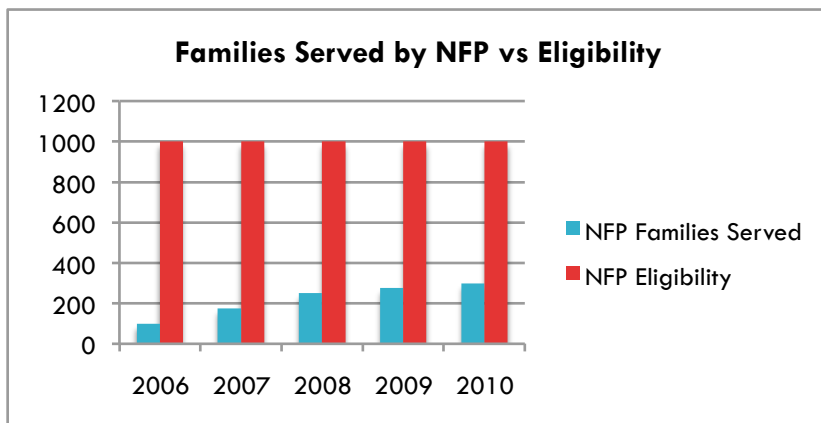
The Youth Bureau has been the primary convenor of discussions and planner of initiatives around positive youth development in our community. The Youth Bureau's staff have played a critical, often central, role in coordinating training for youth service providers, improving the capacity of providers and thus increasing the quality of services across the County. Now, as staff and funding are decreasing, the Youth Bureau's ability to convene and plan is greatly reduced.

**We understand that the County, in light of state reductions, has initiated internal conversations about how to structure responsibilities for youth development within County departments in order to preserve these important functions. We applaud this proactive approach. We recommend that the County continue on this path by involving agencies in the community by pulling together a small County-Community team. Preserving the important Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau functions of training and capacity building for community service staff and programs should be a focus for prioritizing how to use decreasing Youth Bureau resources.**

**Child Abuse Prevention**

Child neglect and abuse is rising in our community each year. Estimates are that more than 8,500 children will be victims of suspected maltreatment or neglect in 2012 – a 15 percent increase since 2008. The percent of “founded” reports (those with strong evidence that abuse or neglect is occurring) remains relatively level at about 30%, but important recent research has found that the majority of kids with a report, founded or not, have poor life outcomes. The vast majority of these kids are not in a healthy, nurturing environment that supports and protects their health and development. The County has an array of services to intervene and help families once child abuse and neglect have been identified but there are also programs that enable us, as a community, to prevent abuse and neglect in the first place. Prevention happens through evidence-based, proven programs that foster positive, healthy parenting. Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), for example, reduces incidents of abuse and neglect by 48% and returns \$5 for every \$1 invested.

**The Children’s Agenda commends the County for making NFP and Building Healthy Children (BHC) priorities by holding their 2012 funding and services steady. We are grateful that, despite cuts in funding and in other programs, that the County worked hard to preserve these preventive programs.**



**To continue on this successful path, we recommend that the County formally commit in a policy statement in 2012 to bring these programs up to full capacity by 2015 to ensure that all eligible families are receiving these programs. We will team up with the County, the United Way, and other community partners to advocate for additional funding for home visiting - in the Medicaid Redesign process at the State level, for example, and the Center for Medicaid Innovative Funding at the Federal level. Reaching eligible families will reduce infant mortality, reduce child abuse, and improve the quality of life for a large proportion of local families with infants and preschoolers known to be at risk for child abuse and neglect.**

## Commendations

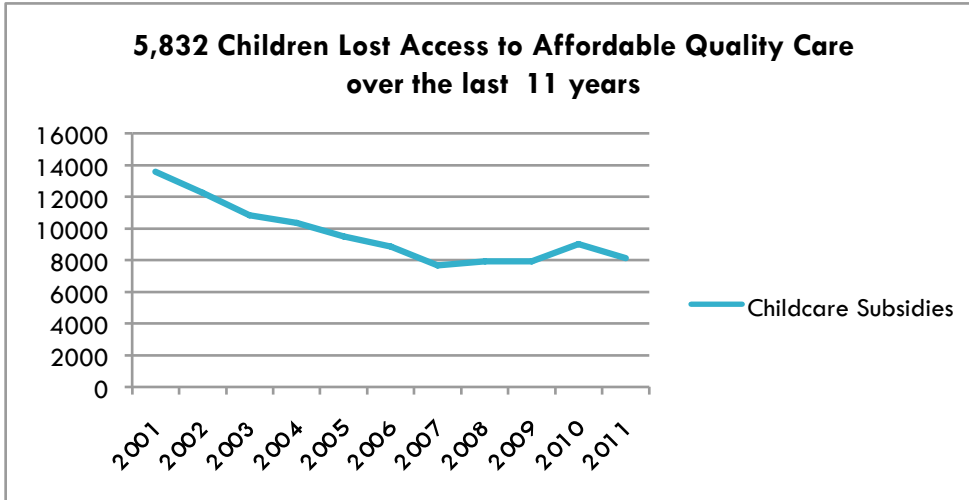
### Child Care Subsidies

Children in families with low incomes who attend high-quality child care accomplish more in school and in life. Their parents perform better at work. Taxpayers benefit, too. Every dollar invested in high-quality child care returns between \$7 and \$17 in tax savings due to fewer services needed for those children as they grow and develop. Child care subsidies are critically important because high quality child care is almost always prohibitively expensive for low-income working families. When a family no longer receives a child care subsidy, two types of problems arise:

- 1) Children often end up in substandard care, making them ill-prepared to enter primary school and setting them on a path for troubles later in life.
- 2) Lack of child care subsidies can prevent parents from working, which only serves to keep children in poverty. Low-wage workers must either leave the workforce altogether or expend work time on alternatives. These difficult choices increase worker absenteeism, decrease productivity as parents are distracted from their jobs by child care difficulties, and make it challenging for employers to find low-wage workers.

Although the proposed 2012 budget shows a funding decrease for child care subsidies overall and a decrease in children served, Monroe County has invested additional local tax dollars above the level required by New York State to serve additional children for the third year in a row. In addition, the County has implemented the State-recommended market rate increase in provider reimbursement to fund the true cost of care, has continued to encourage providers to become accredited by maintaining a 10% higher reimbursement rate for accredited programs, and has maintained eligibility at 165 percent of the poverty level.

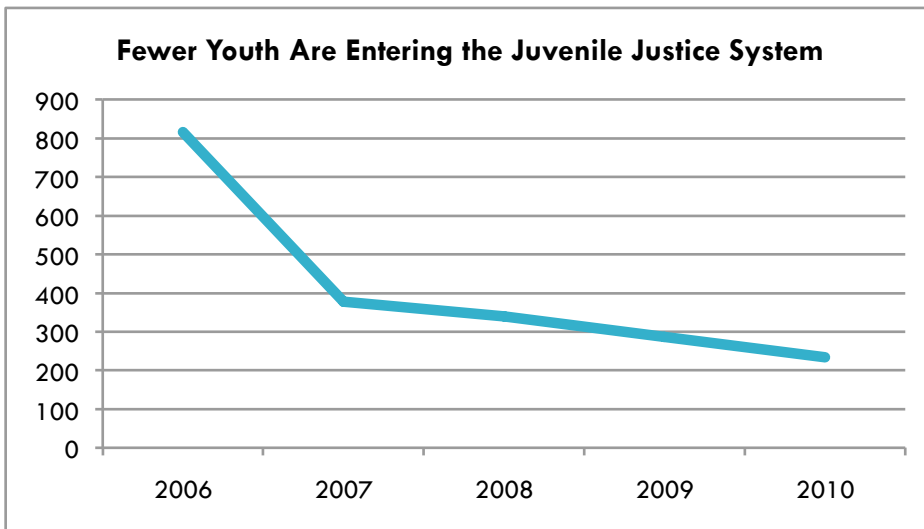
The Children's Agenda commends the County government's leadership for these efforts. In the long term, however, New York State and the federal government should invest more in child care. The number of children locally who can access these subsidies has been cut by nearly 50 percent in the past decade. **Given these losses, we are committed to continuing to team with the County and the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) and offer to actively advocate with the County for increased State and Federal investment to best serve low income working families.**



### Group and Institutional Foster Care

The Proposed 2012 budget shows a positive downward trend in the number of youth in group and institutional care, dropping 29 percent in the past five years, from 219 to 155. This is a dramatic decrease, and a very important result for kids and families. A multi department effort to drive down placements of PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision: youth, ages 10 to 16, who are “ungovernable, truant, runaway, or delinquent,” and often have families that aren’t functioning well) has also been successful.

Older children who enter foster care often do so through the juvenile justice system. This group of children and youth are more likely to be placed in Group/Institutional Foster Care. These placements are incredibly expensive, up to a rate of \$250,000 per child per year. More importantly, research has found that these placements often do not help kids nor deter repeat offenses. **The Children’s Agenda applauds the County for the hard work and partnership-building across departments that has resulted in this success.**



## Further Conversations Needed for Clarity and Consensus

### Lead Poisoning Prevention

In the 2012 budget, Monroe County is proposing to cut two grants totaling \$440K to the City of Rochester that has provided money for home lead inspections. The Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning projects that this will reduce the City inspection staff from 25 to 20. Access to 1- and 2-unit buildings has also been reduced because the County eliminated the Quality Home Inspection (QHI) program in July 2010. The County has indicated that this decision was based on a Center for Government Research report on the limited effectiveness of the QHI program in detecting lead in homes<sup>1,2</sup>.

Lead poisoning remains a problem for children in Monroe County, particularly in the City of Rochester. In 2010, nearly 300 Monroe County children were found with elevated levels of lead in their blood. Elevated levels of blood have severe implications for children's health and development. County government bears responsibility for children's health, and County taxpayers ultimately bear the burden of costs for problems caused by lead poisoning as children grow.

The City indicates that fewer lead inspections will occur due to this cut, with a net result of fewer homes that have lead hazards being identified. This could impact a significant number of children who would be exposed to lead. Over the last decade, Monroe County has seen an 80% reduction in the number of children with levels of elevated lead in their blood. The City of Rochester's Lead Law is unique and the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning is highly regarded as a successful coalition of community members, City of Rochester staff, and Monroe County staff who have worked together to achieve notable success in children's health. This conversation and collaborative work must continue. **We recommend that the County work with the City and continue to participate in the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning to ensure that there be no decrease in the number of homes with lead hazards that are identified thus placing no additional children at risk.**

### Special Children's Services

The County oversees the delivery of services for children aged 0-5 with special needs. For most of the last several years, the dollars allocated to this division of the Department of Public Health increased dramatically. In the last two years these dollars have leveled off, though the number of children served has increased slightly (1.1%). The reduction of funding is driven by a State-determined reduction in the reimbursement rate for providers of early intervention services (for children 0-3). This reduction in the reimbursement rate has led many providers to reconsider whether they will continue to offer special needs services. This trend of State-determined rate reductions puts the capacity of quality providers in the community at risk. Five local agencies and 15 independent service providers have discontinued providing early intervention services in the last year. Impacts include a delay of services in some cases and the County's ability to fully meet the determined needs of the child being compromised. For example, in some cases children are unable to get the prescribed dosage of care and there could be delays in serving children quickly enough. **To increase understanding and advance the community dialogue, we recommend that the County and providers of early intervention services create an estimate of the impact on children from state-driven rate reductions.**

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<sup>1</sup> Commissioner Reed Testimony, Monroe County Human Services Committee, November 29, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Governmental Research, An Evaluation of the City of Rochester's Lead Law, 2006-2008.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our report and conclusions are always the result of a true team effort. Carolyn Lee-Davis led the analysis and the writing of the report and the entire TCA staff made vital contributions. Special thanks to the members of The Children's Agenda's Policy Committee for their advice and guidance throughout our analysis, along with their support in crafting our conclusions. We appreciate efforts of Monroe County Leadership, in particular Scott Adair, Andrew Doniger, and Kelly Reed to provide information useful for this analysis and report. Finally, we also wish to thank the Waldron-Rise Foundation for a grant specifically in support of our annual analysis of the Monroe County budget as well as the foundations that provide general support, which covers some of the costs of this work, including the Brighter Days Fund, the Brush Family Fund, Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation, Polisseni Foundation, Rochester Area Community Foundation, and the Joan and Harold Feinbloom Foundation.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For an electronic version of this report, please visit [www.thechildrensagenda.org/MonroeCountyBudget](http://www.thechildrensagenda.org/MonroeCountyBudget). For more information, call Dr. Jeff Kaczorowski, Executive Director, at (585) 256-2620.

*The Children's Agenda is an independent, non-profit organization in Rochester, New York. We serve as the objective, passionate voice for Monroe County children and youth by promoting evidence-based policies and programs that focus on prevention.*