



**Office of Children  
and Family Services**

**LEGISLATIVE FISCAL COMMITTEES'  
JOINT BUDGET HEARING**

**SFY 2024-25 Executive Budget  
Human Services**

**Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq.  
Acting Commissioner**

**Wednesday, January 31, 2024**

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**State Fiscal Year 2024-25 Executive Budget**  
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**New York State Office of Children and Family Services**  
**Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq., Acting Commissioner**

Good morning, Chair Krueger, Children and Families Committee Chairs Hevesi and Brisport, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly, and well-wishes to Chair Weinstein for a speedy recovery. I am Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Acting Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). I appreciate this opportunity to present Governor Hochul's State Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget that enhances our mission to protect and strengthen all of New York's children, youth, families, and communities, a commitment I know each of you share as well.

OCFS is committed to accomplishing this goal by following our guiding 'North Star' principle of equity. Our pledge is that every program, policy, or initiative funded by the Executive Budget will further transform our human services system into one that is far more responsive, not reactive, to the needs of under resourced and vulnerable New Yorkers.

We are doing this with a renewed commitment to center each of our initiatives in equity. It's only by transforming our human services system into one that values all voices, and brings the changes they are calling for, that we can make our State safer and more supportive for everyone. This year's Executive Budget offers another critical opportunity to make truly meaningful investments in OCFS's core child care, child welfare, adult services and juvenile justice programs that deliver the services New Yorkers need now more than ever.

It is a true honor to serve a Governor with such an unwavering dedication to increasing access to quality, affordable child care for New York's families. Before Governor Hochul took office, New York's Child Care Assistance Program struggled to give families the help they needed. Years of neglect and underinvestment left far too many families out completely, and for those who were fortunate enough to be included, they faced a confusing patchwork where the benefits that were available to them varied, sometimes greatly, based on nothing more than where they lived. Under the Governor's steadfast leadership, investments in child care have grown to record levels and New York is now a national leader in increasing affordability and access to child care.

I want to make clear that the more than \$7 billion over four years dedicated to child care also wouldn't have been possible without your partnership, and I am so proud of the accomplishments we have achieved together. For years, the most a family could earn while remaining eligible for child care assistance was 200 percent of the federal poverty level, about \$60,000 for a family of four, and, because of sliding scale eligibility, even that level of income disqualified many families from assistance. Those families who did receive assistance faced co-pays of at least 10 percent of their income above the poverty level, to as much as 30 percent in some counties. Today, New York is one of just a handful of states where eligibility for child care assistance is at the federal maximum of 85 percent of state median income, which is more than \$99,000 for a family of four, and co-pays are capped at one percent of family income above the poverty level – both of which are now the standard for all of New York's families receiving assistance, regardless of where in New York they reside.

This year's Executive Budget continues the State's commitment to affordability with nearly \$1.8 billion this year for the Child Care Assistance Program. To illustrate just how far we have come, in the fiscal year 2022 budget – a mere three years ago – the total funding provided for child care assistance, from state and federal sources, was \$832 million, an increase of 114.5% in just three years.

Governor Hochul also understands that without a strong workforce, we won't be able to meet the high demand for these services. Since 2021, more than \$1.4 billion has been provided to child care providers for stabilization and workforce retention. This year's Executive Budget allocates \$280 million in underutilized federal pandemic funds to continue the Workforce Retention Grant program and provide another round of bonus payments to staff in caregiving roles, as well as funding to support child care programs' efforts to recruit new staff, offer sign-on and referral bonuses, and more, providing additional payments to nearly 14,000 child care programs statewide.

Hardworking families don't just deserve access to child care, we need to make sure they have the peace of mind to know that when they drop off their children, it's at a high-quality program, no matter where they live or work. The proposed Budget provides \$5 million to pilot staffed Family Child Care Networks in regions around the state. Home-based providers, which include family and group family providers, are the largest component of our provider pool and are mostly run by women of color. These networks will focus on supporting and growing the capacity of these small business owners and entrepreneurs by offering opportunities for long term coaching, access to business supports and resources along with peer-to-peer support. The Budget will also boost quality by creating an enhanced payment rate for providers that are accredited by a nationally recognized child care organization, participate in QUALITYstarsNY, or have

completed training and actively participate in the state's Non-Patient Epinephrine Auto-Injector Initiative.

Protecting our precious children is also a major part of Governor Hochul's broader focus on the mental health crisis. The Budget invests \$1.7 million in the seven regional infant and toddler resource centers across the state to expand the consultation services they offer to providers and families. These resource centers offer mental health consultations as a critical primary prevention tool to support providers by pairing them with a mental health professional to improve a child's social, emotional, and behavioral health with the goals of reducing challenging behaviors, promoting healthy relationships, and improving social-emotional skills.

This year's Executive Budget also provides over \$100 million in funding for after school programming, an overall increase of \$17.7 million from last year's Executive Budget recommendation. The Budget also combines the previous Advantage and Empire State After-School programs into a single program, which will standardize funding and eligibility, reducing administrative burdens for providers. This additional funding will help to drive program quality, with a focus on young people's social and emotional health and wellbeing and reflects our commitment to focus dollars on older youth and out-of-school time.

Of course, Governor Hochul's commitment to New York's children, youth, families, and vulnerable and marginalized populations runs so much deeper than child care, and this year's Budget makes the critical investments in the programs and services that enable OCFS to continue supporting, uplifting, and promoting their development. This year's budget includes an increase from \$4.4 million to over \$10 million to raise the minimum wage of employees of State-funded contractors operating OCFS programs. Additionally, Governor Hochul has included a COLA increase in every budget she has proposed since taking office. This year's 1.5% COLA will once again benefit the families and voluntary agencies who care for New York's children in foster care, and adoptive parents.

As New York's first female Governor, Governor Hochul knows and cares deeply about the matters most important to women. Not only has she been fighting for women balancing motherhood and careers by making historic investments in child care, but the Governor has also made tackling New York's troublingly high rates of maternal mortality a hallmark of her administration. OCFS applauds Governor Hochul's focus in the Executive Budget on addressing the maternal and infant health crisis and her initiatives to increase access to prenatal care, increase access to Doula services, and improve maternal mental health. As part of the Governor's comprehensive approach to create

conditions for improving maternal and infant health, the Executive Budget includes \$2 million in new funding for OCFS for an effort to reduce the risk of Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths (SUID) by providing something so many of us take for granted – a safe crib! As the Governor noted in her State of the State, sleep-related deaths are the most common type of preventable child fatalities that come to the attention of state officials and roughly two infants tragically die each week in an unsafe sleep setting, resulting in more than 120 infant deaths per year. Portable cribs will be made available to under resourced families who need it most. The cribs will be distributed via local departments of social services and other local organizations. Additionally, medical professionals at birthing hospitals will also facilitate referrals where a need for a crib is identified.

Since taking office, Governor Hochul has also made keeping all New Yorkers safe a top priority by, among many other things, dedicating unprecedented budget investments toward efforts to stem gun violence and making great strides toward achieving fairness and equity in our criminal justice system. The Governor understands that ensuring there are effective interventions for youth who are at risk of engaging in criminal activity is critical to improving outcomes for our young people and strengthening local communities. As part of the Governor's comprehensive strategy to make New Yorkers safer, this year's budget includes a \$3 million increase in funding, to nearly \$11.4 million, to enhance the Supervision and Treatment Services for Juveniles Program (STSJP). Since its inception in 2011, STSJP has been a key component of New York's vision to transform the youth justice system by incentivizing local programs intended to divert at-risk youth from placement in detention or residential care and to safely maintain them in the community. This increased funding will support new interventions or additional capacity to serve youth with multiple detention admissions or arrests in any 12-month period, youth alleged to have engaged in violent behaviors or vehicle-based crimes, youth who leave home without permission, trafficked youth, and youth at risk of gang recruitment.

I would be remiss if I didn't take an opportunity to commend Governor Hochul for the Executive Budget's investments designed to increase the prosecution of domestic violence cases among high-risk offenders, and for prioritizing solutions for the mental health crisis, particularly among our children and youth. OCFS is proud to partner with OPDV to help survivors recover and gain stability, and with OMH on important cross-system collaborations, to advance the Governor's goals.

Before I close, I would just like to express my gratitude once again for all you have done to bolster our mission to provide truly equitable and impactful services grounded in the dignity our children, families and communities deserve. While we all have different roles

to play, I am confident that the results of our partnership, along with the Governor's unwavering support, is something we can all be proud of.

Under Governor Hochul's leadership, New York is stronger, healthier, safer, and more affordable than when she took office and this year's Executive Budget continues to advance that progress. Thank you for this opportunity to speak directly to you today. I welcome any questions and comments you may have.