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August 15, 2013

Ray Kelly
Commissioner, New York City Police Department
One Police Plaza
New York, NY 10038

Ronald E. Richter
Commissioner, Administration for Children's Services
150 William Street
New York, NY 10038

Dear Commissioners Kelly and Richter:

I write regarding the Close to Home juvenile justice program and concerns that have been raised about the investigation of juvenile warrants that were brought to light by Judge John Hunt's decision in Queens County Family Court on August 6, 2013.

Under the Close to Home initiative, the City has assumed new responsibilities for the guardianship of youth under supervision. Young people, their families and surrounding communities are relying on City agencies in new ways – with new risks and opportunities. In light of the recent implementation of this program, now is the time to address concerns and ensure long-term success.

Judge Hunt's decision in the matter of three young people that escaped from their Close to Home facilities raises concerns about the level of resources ACS and the New York City Police Department (NYPD) are dedicating to the initiative. According to the NYPD detective that is tasked with locating escapees in Queens, there are only five detectives assigned to investigate and execute juvenile warrants in the entire City of New York. This detective must search for an average of 15 to 20 juveniles at a time. The staff and support resources to locate and apprehend escaped youths appear to be woefully insufficient.

I request that NYPD assess the level of resources dedicated to investigating escapes and determine what is needed to make the program work.

Judge Hunt's decision also raises concerns about communication. Cooperation between Family Courts, ACS, NYPD and other local agencies would improve the ability of investigators to work with families and locate young people that have run away from Close to Home facilities. One youth returned to the Children's Village facility in Dobbs Ferry in Westchester County after the Queens County Family Court issued an arrest warrant, yet the staff was unaware and did not engage the Dobbs Ferry Police Department before he escaped again.

ACS and NYPD should jointly evaluate the coordination between agencies and propose changes to coordination and procedures.

The Close to Home initiative has the potential to reduce recidivism, better engage families, and improve outcomes to successfully prepare youths for reentry into their communities. This effort would go a long way toward improving its long-term success.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. I look forward to working with you to improve the juvenile justice program and ensure the best support for young people and their families. Do not hesitate to contact me at 212-298-5565 or squadron@nysenate.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Daniel Squadron", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Daniel Squadron
State Senator
26th District