



# Office of the County Executive

Monroe County, New York

**Adam J. Bello**  
*County Executive*

February 3, 2026

Honorable J. Gary Pretlow  
Chair, Ways and Means Committee  
New York State Assembly  
Room 711-A LOB  
Albany, NY 12247  
[wamchair@nyassembly.gov](mailto:wamchair@nyassembly.gov)

Honorable Liz Krueger  
Chair, Finance Committee  
New York State Senate  
Room 446 CAP  
Albany, NY 12248  
[financechair@nysenate.gov](mailto:financechair@nysenate.gov)

Re: Joint Public Hearings on Mental Hygiene and Human Services

Dear Chairpersons Pretlow and Krueger,

Please accept this letter as testimony regarding the proposed Executive Budget for New York State's 2026 – 2027 Fiscal Year. There is much in the Governor's budget proposal that is to be commended. As the Assembly and Senate work toward a budget that helps all New Yorkers thrive, I respectfully ask for your consideration of a long-standing challenge that impacts some of the most vulnerable people in our communities – children with complex medical, mental health, behavioral health, and developmental needs. I urge the Assembly and Senate to include in their budget proposals **\$25 million in funding for the Council on Children and Family Services** to ensure these children have access to the care they need, when and where they need it. Furthermore, this investment will help alleviate the shortage of hospital beds, skyrocketing costs for healthcare systems, and financial drain on local social service districts.

**Of immediate concern is the fact that children continue to be hospitalized when it is no longer medically necessary** ("delayed discharge" or "boarding") because they are unable to access community-based and residential services. These are not short hospital stays. In Monroe County, we recently had a child board in the hospital for more than 243 days. That is 243 days past the time when he was medically cleared for discharge. However, lack of access to the services he needed meant he remained in the hospital longer than medically necessary.

This is not a problem limited to Monroe County. Based on a study conducted by the Healthcare Association of New York State in 2023, it is estimated that statewide we can expect at least 208 children per year to experience delayed hospital discharges totaling **20,440 in-patient days and 1,632 days in emergency departments**.

Hospitals are not designed for children to live in. It is a lost portion of their childhood with long lasting impacts on their development, education and relationships with family and peers. Time and again, our staff hear from families whose children have born the cost of system failures. This includes a 12 year old child who had multiple hospitalizations and two suicide attempts. One hospitalization resulted in her boarding for more than 120 days on a psychiatric unit where she had no outdoor access, could not see her siblings, was confused and isolated. This was not 120 days of necessary hospitalization, but 120 days past the time she was medically cleared for discharge. As her mother rightly said, it was a “failure of coordination and policy” that led to her child’s extended hospital stay.

When children board in emergency departments and Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Programs (CPEP), the conditions are even more dire. One mother described how her child’s health crises between the ages of 5 – 10 years resulted in a cycle of 10 emergency department stays of 5 – 7 days each. During that time, she had no room but only a bed with a curtain surrounding it. Because an adult was required to stay with her at all times, her mother remained in the emergency department 23 hours a day, with the nurses allowing her to go home for only one hour each day to shower and change. Her daughter was subjected to adults yelling through the night, physical restraints, and her bed being removed by hospital staff as punishment. The fact that the staff were not trained in pediatric mental health compounded the trauma.

**The essence of the problem is not that these children’s needs are impossible to meet. It is that their medical, emotional and behavioral needs span across state agencies and do not fit neatly into eligibility criteria for any single system.** This creates confusion and conflicts over which state agency is responsible, including the Office of Children and Family Services, Office of Mental Health, Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, and State Education Department. Children whose needs fall under only one of these state agencies can be served relatively easily. The problem arises when a child’s needs require the involvement of two or more of these agencies. For example, a teenager with a mental health disorder who also has a low IQ and limited verbal skills may be denied admission to an OMH licensed facility due to limited intellectual functioning, while also denied admission to an OPWDD licensed facility because of their need for mental health services.

The state unit that is supposed to resolve these conflicts is the Council on Children and Family Services Interagency Resolution Unit. However, the unit is severely limited by inadequate staffing, no access to an online portal with real-time information about where services are available, no systematically monitored data to track trends in hospital boarding, and limited authority to compel state agencies to find a way to meet a child’s needs. The \$25 million we are seeking for the Council on Children and Family Services would provide them the resources they need to:

- **Conduct rapid evaluation and diagnostic studies** upon referral of a child to the Council to determine what services will allow the child to safely and successfully return home or to an appropriate residential placement in or near their own community
- Create a **confidential, online data portal** to help state, local and voluntary agencies coordinate residential and community-based services
- Effectively provide **multi-system care coordination**
- Deliver **regular reports** to the Governor and legislature on the status of children boarding in hospitals so we have an accurate and detailed picture that informs further effective, efficient solutions

While the state faces many demands on its budget, this \$25 million investment in solutions is far less than what we are already paying by inaction:

- A hospital survey done by the Healthcare Association of New York State found **medical costs of \$167 million in a single 3-month period** due to New Yorkers with complex needs, children and adults, being hospitalized in-patient beyond the time medically necessary.
- In 2023, 249 children were sent to out-of-state residential programs because there was no program available in New York. A case of out-of-state care is costing a county in western New York \$455,606 per year for the care and education of one child. This is typical for out-of-state care, yielding an **estimated annual statewide cost of \$113.4 million.**
- Our hospital systems experience further financial burdens due to **lost hospital bed space.** It is not only a matter of the individual child occupying a bed they no longer medically need. Because of safety and supervision, hospitals often must shut down an entire multi-bed area to accommodate a single child. This compounds the hospital bed shortage, decreases the public's access to care, and results in lost revenue for hospitals.
- County governments also bear high costs when hospitals discharge children to the county's care with no ability to return the child home and no residential facility available. **Child welfare staff have had to house children in county conference rooms, hotel rooms, and short-term rentals with two staff providing round-the-clock care and supervision** until a suitable placement can be found.

A \$25 million investment in the Council on Children and Family Services will support a more effective, coordinated, efficient, and responsive way of caring for New York's most vulnerable children. Thank you for your consideration as we seek solutions that help all New Yorkers thrive.

Sincerely,



Adam J. Bello

Monroe County Executive

