



THE LEGISLATURE
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

DATE

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor, New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

My colleagues and I write to you today on behalf of the more than 55,000 New Yorkers working in not-for-profit child welfare organizations throughout our state. These workers are the backbone of our foster care system, providing support to our foster parents and children living in homes, as well as working around the clock to care for children and youth in residential foster care. They are also responsible for going out into our communities to provide the preventive services families need to keep children safe at home and out of the foster care system.

During the COVID-19 crisis, these workers have proven to be the essential personnel they have been deemed by the state: each day leaving their own families to serve as critical supports for the children and families in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. They are a vital part of the Family of New York.

We are therefore respectfully requesting that New York State support these essential workers by:

- Providing priority access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as it becomes available in our state, as several of the nonprofits are having trouble sourcing PPE;
- Prioritizing the youth and staff in residential foster care settings for rapid COVID-19 Testing as it becomes available in New York, which will help to protect their health and safety in a congregate setting where the virus spreads more quickly;
- Providing emergency funding to pay staff who are responding to the COVID-19 crisis in order to cover costs associated with overtime as well as emergency response pay (short-term, one-time funding to support these staff while they continue to act as first responders); and

- Giving priority access to these essential staff for any additional free or very low-cost child care that the state creates.

For context, over the last several years, under your administration, we have successfully worked together to support children and youth who are wards of the state and have been placed into foster care.

We have also worked together to provide critical preventive services funding, which has driven down the total number of children and youth in foster care in New York State to 16,000, down from a high of approximately 65,000 children and youth in foster care in the 1990s.

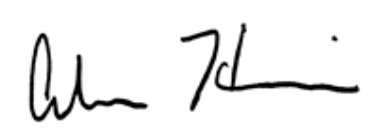
However, The Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) completed a survey in 2019 that showed the average child welfare agency in New York State had on average 21 days' or less of cash on hand, making cash flow for these agencies a very critical concern.

In addition, COFCCA has surveyed residential foster care agencies and has found that during the week of April 6, 2020, 11.4% of residential foster care staff were unable to report to work due to COVID-19 related reasons—including staff with confirmed COVID-19, staff out with symptoms of COVID-19, and staff out due to a lack of access to child care.

It is clear that COVID-19 is having a significant impact on these agencies, and we believe it is New York State's responsibility to provide stability in the child welfare and juvenile justice sectors for the duration of this crisis.

We thank you for your leadership and look forward to working with you to provide for the needs of these essential workers during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Sincerely,



Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi
Chair, Social Services



Senator Roxanne J. Persaud
Chair, Social Services



Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee
Chair, Children and Families



Senator Velmanette Montgomery
Chair, Children and Families

