

Submitted Testimony

Of

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Before

The Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services

NYS Legislative Office Building

**John A. DeFrancisco, Chairman, Senate Finance
Committee**

and

**Herman D. Farrell, Jr., Chairman, Assembly Ways and
Means Committee**



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Testimony before the Joint Legislative Hearing on the
Human Services Budget

Chairmen Farrell and DeFrancisco, on behalf of the network of youth bureaus that guide and provide a wide array of youth development services, the Association of New York State Youth Bureaus (ANYSYB) offers recommendations regarding the 2014-15 *Executive Budget*. I am Jackie Negri, Executive Director of the Association.

Summary of Budget Priorities:

Make funding restorations to maintain prior year youth development commitments to:

1. **Restore \$1.28 million to the Youth Development Program** to maintain the SFY 2013-14 levels for the previous YDDP/SDPP programs. This action will allow for the promised, smooth transition of the county, town and village youth bureau system to the Youth Development Program, which was established in SFY 2013-14 budget. The newly developed program, a result of consolidated program funding streams of YDDP and SDPP in the 2013-14 budget, provides administrative relief to local districts while promoting a comprehensive youth development agenda in services, program assessment and performance measures. Since 2008 state support for youth development programs has declined from \$36 million to \$15.3 million.
2. **Restore \$254, 456.00 for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) programs** to maintain SFY 2013-14 levels.
3. **Restore \$500,000 for the Advantage After-school** program to maintain SFY 2013-2014 levels.

Make necessary commitments to prevent unintended consequences and address emerging needs:

1. Reject the Chronic Disease Prevention Block Grant proposed by the Governor in the Department of Health budget proposal. Maintain dedicated funding for **Obesity and Diabetes Prevention**; and add \$3.2 million to allow \$10 million to be available this year to fight the chronic disease development. To ensure youth are afforded priority status in weight-related disease prevention, authorize a transfer of \$1.5 million

from the Department of Health to the Office of Child and Family Services to fund the “Go Healthy Challenge” at certain afterschool and summer recreation programs. A recent *New York Times* article (Jan 29, 2014; “Obesity Found to Take Its Hold in Earliest Years”) indicated that youth who are at a normal weight at age 11 will not become obese adults. The research emphasizes that establishing health eating and activity habits in young children is the single most effective method of preventing life-long obesity.

2. Amend the directive and authority of the **“Raise the Age”** Commission (the Commission on Youth, Public Safety and Justice) to allow their report to include recommendations on the array of services and supports necessary to address the anticipated demands on the Juvenile Justice system. This would include funding recommendations for court-ordered community programs and services to ensure access to the kinds of evidence-informed community-based services and alternatives to incarceration that have already proven to reduce recidivism.
3. Add an initial investment of \$7 million for **afterschool program development** to build the quality infrastructure of new and existing afterschool programs, by investing in building the data systems to monitor program performance, train and support best practices, and modernize the contracting and reporting of afterschool programs. This initial investment will help develop a sustainable system that is ready to support the proposed \$750 million investment promised for 2015 and beyond.
4. Accept the Governor’s recommendation to expand funding by \$2.5 million for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), and consider adding an addition \$10 million to address the increase in minimum wage. Unfortunately, the minimum wage increase will reduce from last year the number of youth who can participate in the program without additional funds. Carefully review the proposed eligibility changes to understand how the new distribution methodology might impact individual counties.

Budget Testimony:

As you are aware, last year the state budget agreement forever changed the Youth Development funding in the state by consolidating and revising the YDDP and SDPP funding streams into a single Youth Development Program. After seeing the funding drop from \$39 million in 2008, to just \$14.1 million, it was time to make a change. However, this year, because of the timing of

allocations, the Legislative add of \$1.28 million is once again needed to truly maintain the funding during this critical transition year for the program. I refer to this year as critical because the consolidation of the funding and development of a new county-based allocation methodology has not yet taken place and if your commitment to the town, village and other municipal youth bureaus is fulfilled, the funding needs to be maintained. By maintaining funding at last year's level more than 1.5 million youth will again benefit from the services our network of youth bureaus provide.

The end product of a strong youth development system is to offer skills that build our state's citizenry, including: supporting timely High school graduation, providing career and job readiness training, teaching civic responsibility and diverting juvenile violators from entering or re-entering the delinquency system. To achieve these goals, youth bureaus provide direct services and also fund an array of community-based, non-profit agencies. Funding supports programs and services that build youth's skills that allow them to graduate from high school, receive career and job readiness training, learn civic responsibility and prevent juvenile violators from re-entering the delinquency system; including:

- Afterschool prevention programs
- Out-of-school job readiness and summer jobs
- Healthy eating and obesity prevention
- Mentoring programs
- Programs to prevent youth involvement in gangs and substance use; and
- Supports for runaway and homeless youth as well as pregnant and parenting teams

We thank the Legislature for their commitment to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act program and urge restoration of the \$254,456.00 legislative addition to that program.

We acknowledge the tremendous support the Executive expressed for the future of afterschool funding. However, we urge the Legislature to continue their support for non-profit, community based organizations that provide quality afterschool services. It appears that the Executive would distribute future afterschool funding through school districts, but we urge the Legislature to remain engaged in determining the eligibility criteria for organizations eligible for afterschool expansion funding. And within this year's budget we ask for two specific actions: First, to restore \$500,000 to the Advantage Afterschool program so that capacity can be maintained at prior year levels;

and Second, to invest \$7 million into building the data reporting and training infrastructure that will be necessary to support the proposed, future expansion of afterschool programming. This funding will allow for design, development and investment activities relating to the identification of quality reporting identification and technology, staffing and training determinations and referral capacity within the community so parents can easily identify quality programs for their children. We believe a \$7 million initial investment will ensure that future investments are well-spent.

The Association strongly supports the Governor's recommendation to convene and fund a Commission charged with identifying amendments to our criminal justice sentencing guidelines. However, we ask the Legislature not only to support this initial review of how to "Raise the Age" but to expand the charge to the Commission on Youth, Public Safety and Justice, to ensure recommendations about the necessary community program expansion to support sentencing changes. As a result of the "Close to Home" initiative in the metropolitan New York area, we know how effective evidence-based alternatives to incarceration services can be in reducing recidivism. We also know that court-ordered community services and evaluations are a burden to community providers unless adequately funded. If we want to ensure access to the kinds of community-based services that will make sentencing reform possible, the Commission needs to report back on the scope of expansion necessary to ensure success.

Lastly, we raise the issue of childhood obesity prevention as a continued priority. We have heard from Senator Klein, Assemblyman Ortiz and others about their concern over the health of young New Yorkers. In the Department of Health budget, the Obesity & Diabetes Prevention program is slated to be "block granted" with other Chronic Disease Prevention programs. We asked that the \$6.8 million for this program be maintained as stand-alone funding. And, to address the growing problem of childhood obesity prevention, the Legislature add an additional \$3.2 million, with authority to direct funds to early childhood camp, afterschool and summer recreation programs. This could be implemented in conjunction with the Office of Children and Family Services to support activity and nutritional supports in appropriate child serving setting. The target has to be children and adolescents. A recent New York Times article (Jan 29, 2014 "Obesity Found to Take Hold in Earliest Years") sited research that indicated youth who are at a normal weight at age 11 will not become obese as adults. However, children who are obese at the age of 5 will remain obese throughout their lifetime. The research emphasizes

that healthy eating and activity habits are formed at the earliest ages. We must do more to influence childhood behavior as it relates to exercise, activity and nutrition. We hope you will agree that by adding nutrition and exercise programming to existing youth opportunity services, we can reach youth individually and influence their independent knowledge of health eating, food selection and the value of regular exercise.

Thank you for your consideration of these important youth development requests.

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