



Written Testimony Submitted By:
Deborah Rosen, Managing Director, Strategic Partnerships,
Hillside Family of Agencies

At the Joint Hearing of the
New York State Assembly Committee on Ways & Means
&
New York State Senate Committee on Finance

On the 2017-18 Executive Budget

February 17, 2017

Thank you for giving Hillside Family of Agencies the opportunity to present written testimony regarding this year's Executive budget. In addition, I would like to thank the Legislature for your continued support of Hillside Family of Agencies, our staff, and most importantly, the over 13,000 children and families we serve each year.

As an agency, we continue to struggle with restraints on our funding which is approximately 90% state and local, while continuously investing into services to meet the needs of the children and families we serve. Across our Hillside territory, we are seeing youth enter care with more complex needs and trauma, increased violence, poverty, substance abuse, mental illness among youth and their families, and a need for additional investments into community based services. In addition, increased mandated costs such as the minimum wage, New York's new overtime rules, and the Justice Center are having a profound impact on our agency but also affect our ability to recruit and retain a quality workforce that will be able to provide the quality services to our youth and families.

Advocacy by the Legislature over the last few years has helped Hillside directly through securing funding for direct Hillside programs and services as well as funding for foster care, 853 schools, pre-schools, and our mental health services. We thank you again for your continued support and ask for your assistance in the following areas regarding this year's 2017-18 budget:

CHILD WELFARE

Hillside provides foster care both community based and residential across our service territory. Our residential foster care campuses are located in Rochester, Romulus, Bath and Auburn and provide care to youth who have experienced trauma, mental health, self-harming or sexually aggressive behaviors, or a combination of all of the above. Our community based foster care services work to recruit and train foster families who can provide care to youth close to home.

In addition, we provide prevention and protection services with our county partners to keep youth home in their community and to avoid foster care placements, operate two regional OCFS permanency centers and support adoptive families with post-adoption services. Lastly, in relation to child welfare, Hillside has been able to find innovative financing through public/private partnerships that helps support Hillside Work Scholarship Connection, mainly for services in Rochester.

Hillside Specific Requests -

Reinvesting in Youth – Hillside has operated an alternative to detention program in the City of Rochester since 2009. The program was originally created by the Legislature as a way to create community based services at a time when the state was reducing state capacity. Hillside was the only agency in Upstate New York to receive this funding and believes this program is essential to Rochester but also a program that could be replicated in other areas of the state. Youth ages 11 to 17 are referred to the program through Probation and must be medium to high on the risk inventory scale. Since RIY's inception, over 237 youth have gone through the program, averaging an 85% success rate, from detention, over the last three years. The Executive budget does not include funding for this program. **Hillside is requesting \$300,000 to maintain services in Rochester.** We have requested the Executive reconsider and include funding in his 30 day amendments but believe the Legislature will once again have to include funding in the final enacted budget.

Community Optional Prevent Services - The Executive budget includes level funding in the amount of \$12.1 million for Community Optional Prevent Services. This funding has allowed us to partner with Monroe County for many years to raise private dollars to access state funding. In Monroe County, this funding supports Hillside Work Scholarship Connection, Encompass Learning, and Mt. Hope Family Center. **We support this funding and encourage this type of public/private funding.**

Post Adoption Services – The Executive budget includes \$7 million for the Federal Adoption and Guardianship Assistance Program for post-adoption and prevention services. **This is a \$2 million increase from SFY 16-17 that we strongly support.**

Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) –

Hillside is a member of COFCCA and has supported their COFCCA Cares4Kids campaign for the last three years. The campaign is designed to raise awareness about youth in foster care, the need for a qualified workforce, and investments for deferred maintenance of residential foster care agencies. Our foster care funding, which is established through an administrative process between the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) and the Division of Budget (DOB), was stagnant for seven years. We greatly appreciate the support and advocacy of the Legislature, which resulted in small increases being obtained over the last two years. Hillside supports the following requests that are part of the COFCCA Cares4 Kids campaign:

- **4% increase to the Maximum State Aid Rate (MSAR) for July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018.** While the MSAR is established, post-budget through an administrative rate process between OCFS and DOB, we hope you will use the budget process to highlight the need for investments into the foster care system and help our advocacy efforts this year to impact the administrative rate setting process.
- **\$1 million to establish the Child Welfare Workforce Higher Education Opportunity Program.** \$500,000 would be available for tuition support, the NYS Child Welfare Worker Incentive Scholarship, and the remaining \$500,000 would be available for loan forgiveness, the NYS Child Welfare Loan Forgiveness Program. We believe this type of support will assist our current workforce to be able to go back to school and advance their career. For our agency, this will help us be able to recruit the workforce we need from social workers to nurses, to IT professionals for which we are not able to compete with regards to salary or benefits that other industries provide.
- **\$15 million for Capital Improvements and Deferred Maintenance on Residential Campuses for Youth in Care.** Our residential infrastructure is old and in continuous need of repairs and investments for which our rates do not adequately cover. This funding would allow us to invest in security cameras that will help our residents as well as staff as well as deferred maintenance such as heating, cooling, energy efficiencies, etc.

In addition, Hillside supports COFCCA's request in response to the Executive budget for the funding to be included in the final SFY 17-18 enacted budget to cover increased minimum wage costs for foster care agencies that are in line with funding provided to other providers. Last year, we were happy to see the Legislature added funding in the final budget to help cover costs for certain Medicaid providers and private special education schools. Our 853 schools benefitted from this support. However, the final budget did not include any funding to support increased costs for

our foster care services. Through COFCCA last year, we advocated for increased costs to be captured by our foster care rate for the period of July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018.

While we were unsuccessful, we believe there is still opportunity. The first year of the increase will not have as much of an impact as the full phase in. The Executive budget included funding for certain Medicaid providers and for our 853 schools but not for foster care. The result is a teacher's aide employed by one of our 853 schools will benefit but the child care worker, who cares for the same youth, on the same campus, will not. **We hope the Legislature will support our agency and our workforce and advocate for funding to be included in the final budget for foster care agencies to cover increased costs associated with minimum wage.**

MENTAL HEALTH

Hillside operates three Office of Mental Health licensed Residential Treatment Facilities (RTF) facilities, which are located in Rochester and Auburn and has an affiliation with Stillwater RTF located in Greene, NY. RTFs serve youth statewide and are designed to stabilize and/or maintain the psychiatric well-being of youth who are experiencing mental health issues through teaching skill sets to help children transition home or to a lower level of care. In addition, we operate outpatient mental health clinics and provide day treatment services.

Similar to our concerns outlined above in relation to foster care, we are in need of supports to recruit and retain a qualified workforce, increased funding to support our services, and targeted investments for infrastructure to create new capacity and maintain existing services. Hillside is a member of the New York State Coalition of Children's Behavioral Health and support the following requests:

- **\$17.5 million investment into children's behavioral health services.** This funding includes:
 - Restoration of \$7.5 million budgeted in SFY 16-17 for new capacity. This funding was not spent last year. These funds are critical to create new capacity, which is needed.
 - \$10 million for readiness funds that will assist mental health providers to be ready for the integration of behavioral health into Medicaid Managed Care.
- **Amendments to the State Healthcare Facility Transformation Program:**
 - To set-aside \$125 million of the \$500 million proposed in the Executive health budget for the State Healthcare Facility Transformation program for community providers.
 - An amendment to Article VII language in S.3007/A.2007 that would explicitly state that a facility means an RTF for children and youth which is a sub-class of hospital.

EDUCATION

Hillside Specific Requests –

Once again, Hillside is pleased to see the Governor included \$490,000 in funding for Hillside Work Scholarship Connection (HWSC) to support services in Rochester. We hope you will support this critical funding for HWSC.

853 Schools –

Hillside operates multiple 853 schools that are located on our campuses in Rochester, Bath, Romulus, and Auburn. These schools educate youth who are in residence as well as day students from local public schools. Hillside is a member of the NYS Coalition of 853 Schools and supports the following requests that will help our schools, staff, and infrastructure:

- **Support of a growth factor on par with the State’s support for public schools.** With the help of the Legislature 853 schools have experienced growth over the last four years that is in line with increases provided to public schools. We hope you will continue to support increases for 853 schools that are on par with support for public schools;
- **\$25 million Capital Investment to support deferred maintenance at 853 schools.** The current support for 853 schools does not adequately provide for capital improvements or maintenance of 853 schools. Targeted support will help us undertake repairs, renovations, purchase of energy efficient equipment or generators;
- **\$6.2 million in funding included in the Executive budget to support minimum wage increases.** Last year the Legislature included funding in the Enacted budget to support increases costs for 853 schools related to implementation of the minimum wage. The Executive budget includes funding to continue this support. We hope you will support this funding;
- **NYSED’s request to increase the Excess Teacher Turnover Prevention Program by \$4 million.** Over the last few years, we have experienced increased teacher turnover at our schools and are at a disadvantage with local public schools in recruiting teachers. We support NYSED’s request for an additional \$4 million in funds for the Excess Teacher Turnover Program. This funding is a first step in helping our schools be able to recruit and retain qualified teachers, especially in critical areas such as special education.

Thank you in advance for your support of Hillside and we are hopeful this year’ budget will have positive impacts for our staff and the families we serve.