



Cutting Child Advocacy Centers Puts New York's Most Vulnerable Children at Risk

By Senator Pamela Helming, District 54

You may have heard about the recently announced \$6.9 million funding cuts impacting Child Advocacy Centers across New York State. Before getting more into the numbers, it is important to explain what these centers do and why these cuts matter.

Child Advocacy Centers do some of the most difficult and important work in our communities. They serve children who have been sexually or physically abused or seriously injured. In the most horrific cases, they work with families when a child's life has been taken.

CACs bring together law enforcement, prosecutors, child protective services, medical and mental health professionals, and victim advocates. Instead of working separately, these professionals work together to support the child and family, investigate what happened, and hold offenders accountable.

For the child, that coordinated approach can make a very difficult experience a little less traumatic. A local CAC provides a safe place for a specially trained interview, a medical exam, and connections to counseling and other support.

That same coordinated approach also strengthens the investigation. When law enforcement, prosecutors and other professionals work together from the beginning, it helps ensure information is gathered appropriately and can help build a stronger case against the offender.

A cut to a CAC creates a ripple effect. It can also mean funding cuts for community partners such as Safe Harbors of the Finger Lakes and Family Counseling Service of the Finger Lakes, which provide counseling, advocacy and other critical services. That puts additional strain on the entire network working to protect children and support families.

I should also mention that these centers are so important that our own state law recognizes them as part of our response to child abuse.

That is why these latest funding cuts are so troubling.

Of New York's 48 Child Advocacy Centers, 36 applied for this funding. Six received no funding at all, including the Child Advocacy Center of the Finger Lakes. Not a reduction. Not less than they requested. Zero dollars.

Another 21 centers received substantial reductions. Altogether, CACs across New York stand to lose more than \$6.9 million, a 31 percent reduction. When I first learned about these cuts, I thought there had to be a mistake. An administrative oversight. A glitch in the system. So my office reached out directly to the New York State Office of Victim Services, or OVS.

Unfortunately, it wasn't a glitch.

Last year's tentative awards were pulled back after the State Comptroller did not approve the funding process, forcing OVS to start over. This year, OVS received unprecedented demand for limited funding. And because no solution was put in place to protect these services, Child Advocacy Centers across the state are facing devastating cuts.

I have always said budgets are about priorities. New York is now spending approximately \$277 billion, roughly \$23 billion more than last year's enacted budget. Despite adding billions of dollars in new spending, funding for Child Advocacy Centers is being cut in ways that will make it harder to protect abused children.

And sadly, the need for these centers is not going away. It is growing. That is why I recently brought together CAC leaders, law enforcement, prosecutors, and community partners from multiple counties to push for a solution.

Together, we are calling on Governor Hochul and OVS to restore this funding and make these centers whole. We are also seeking permanent, long-term funding for these providers to be included in the 2027-28 state financial plan. I will continue working with my colleagues to get this funding restored and protect these services going forward.

Pamela Helming is the New York State Senator for the 54th District, representing Ontario, Wayne, and Livingston counties and the Monroe County towns of Chili, Mendon, Riga, Rush, and Wheatland.

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