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*Submitted
testimony*

**Testimony Submitted by:
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to**

**New York State Legislature, Joint Legislative Hearing
on
Mental Hygiene
Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Hearing**

Monday, February 3, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf SCO Family of Services regarding the FY21 NYS Executive Budget as it pertains to Children's Behavioral Health Care.

SCO Family of Services serves thousands of New York's children in shelters, foster care, residential programs, and early childhood and after school programs; and we witness their challenges every day. Today 1 in 5 children is challenged with emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions, with disproportionate representation among children of color.

There is one thing for certain – Families with children who need behavioral health services must be able to access them. If not:

- We do an injustice to the children whose promise for a successful adulthood will be compromised;
- An injustice to the families that will shatter;
- And an injustice to NY's taxpayers who will foot an exorbitant bill for high-cost in-patient treatment.

A robust system of behavioral supports for children is not optional; we cannot afford to reduce services this year. Rather, they should be increased. SCO urges our elected officials to do more for New York's children and families. To learn what's needed. To really see our children. At SCO, we see children triumph over trauma when they are given the right supports at the right time.

We see promise in children like Kailey, an adolescent at SCO's residential treatment facility, who reconnected with her family and is rebuilding relationships through comprehensive therapies at home.

We see growth in David, a high school student whose anxiety kept him from attending school. David's Youth Peer Advocate arrived at his home at 7am each day to help develop his coping skills. Since that time, David has graduated and is attending college.

And we see hope in children like 12-year old Anton, whose trusting relationship with his in-home therapist literally saved his life, and averted acting on suicidal ideations. Once disclosed, a new treatment plan was developed to address any intrusive thoughts at home or at school.

We see potential in the thousands of children SCO staff interacts with every day.

For those with a diagnosis requiring intervention now, there are no shortcuts to good health and a promising future. The children's behavioral health system needs the financial support and ongoing commitment from our policymakers.

New York needs to do more, not less, to help all of our children live healthier, happier lives.

New York's children deserve better. Our families deserve better. As a member of the *Healthy Minds Healthy Children campaign*, a statewide coalition focused on ensuring that all children and adolescents in New York receive the high quality behavioral health care they need, SCO urges the following for FY21:

- Place a moratorium on any cuts to children's behavioral health services.
- Establish mechanisms to identify, analyze, and address systemic barriers that prevent children and families from accessing timely and appropriate services.
- Hold health plans accountable for meeting contractual obligations and enforce mental health parity laws on behalf of children and youth.

In closing, on behalf of the children and families served through SCO Family of Services, we thank you for the important work you do to advocate for the need of children with behavioral health challenges. Thank you for your continued support and for the opportunity to submit this testimony.