

# *New York State Citizen Review Panels*

*Administered by Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy  
150 State St., 4th Floor, Albany, NY 12207  
Ph: 518-463-1896 ext. 24 Fax: 518-463-3364 dmastin@scaany.org*

October 17, 2008

Honorable David Paterson  
Governor of New York  
Executive Chamber, State Capitol  
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Paterson:

As Chairs of the three New York State Citizen Review Panels, we are writing to urge extreme caution and consideration when cuts are made so that any cost savings achieved does not hurt our most at-risk children.

Our children must be protected. Across the board cuts affect our most vulnerable populations disproportionately, particularly children. We urge you to defend their interests, keep them safe, and provide for their needs. Critical services or programs for children must be held harmless. Cuts in such services can be counter-productive and even fatal. We know that evidenced-based, proven practices such as home visiting services, parent education, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment save children's lives and prevent entry into more costly systems and institutions such as foster care and juvenile justice.

Preventive funding is absolutely critical to meeting the needs of families involved in the child welfare system and preventing further harm to children. The 65/35 state/local share must be preserved in order to have services available in local districts. Our county governments can not pick up any additional costs without increases in property taxes.

Instead, we encourage you to consider the following areas for reform which will save money and lead to better outcomes for children and families:

- 1) Reforms to child welfare's front door: Investigations, SCR, Reporters
  - a. Eliminate anonymous reporting to reduce staffing needs. Ten to fifteen percent of the reports accepted by the State Central Register are made by anonymous callers. A very small percentage of those reports lead to indicated cases. Many states do not accept such calls. Other calls concerning safety (i.e., 911) are not anonymous. Why should calls regarding children's safety be different?
  - b. Allow for a more flexible approach to conducting investigations in the case of multiple reports on one family in order to free staff time. Currently, a fourth report requires the same level of investigation as the first report, even if all prior reports were unfounded.

- c. Review calls made to the SCR by mandated reporters. Over 65% of the more than 150,000 reports accepted by the SCR are unfounded. Every one requires a full investigation which can be very upsetting to families and their children. Two thirds of the reports come from mandated reporters. Is more training needed to promote better understanding of what constitutes an appropriate call to the SCR? Should there be fewer mandated reporters?
- d. Eliminate SCR clearances for hiring personnel and therefore reducing staffing needs. Currently, such screenings lead to a very small number of hits.

2) Child Welfare Workforce reforms

- a. Improve hiring decisions to achieve cost savings. Currently, it costs \$27,000 when a worker leaves or retires to fill a vacant position and train the new person. Many districts experience high turnover rates. Cost savings can be realized by improving hiring decisions.
- b. Consider changing civil service’s approach to hiring caseworkers and supervisors. The test given to applicants is a basic test which is not in any way job related. Further, test scores often keep districts from hiring applicants of choice who are more suited to the position open. Child Welfare caseworkers and supervisors require specialized education, skills in critical thinking, and knowledge of family engagement practices to be successful on the job. Improvements can lead to better hiring decisions and lower turnover.
- c. Make portable technology more available to caseworkers to increase productivity.

Individual panel members have additional ideas for savings.

As citizens charged with reviewing the policies, procedures and practices in child protective services, we believe that reforms can lead to cost savings while improving families lives in New York State. If preventive funding is cut, we believe that more families will suffer and calls to the SCR will increase.

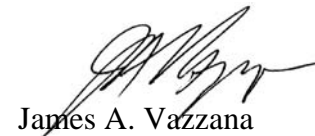
Thank you.

Sincerely,



David Lansner  
Co-Chair  
NYC panel

Mary McCarthy  
Chair  
Eastern Panel



James A. Vazzana  
Chair  
Western Panel

cc: Laura Anglin  
Joseph Baker  
Gladys Carrion  
Kristin Proud  
Dennis Whalen