

New York State Citizen Review Panels

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March 4, 2009

Assembly Member Sheldon Silver
Speaker of the Assembly
932 Legislative Office Building
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12248-0001

Dear Speaker Silver:

As Chairs of the three New York State Citizen Review Panels, we are writing to urge extreme caution and consideration when decisions are made regarding the 2009-10 Budget to assure that any cost savings achieved does not hurt our most at-risk children. We urge you to defend their interests, keep them safe, and provide for their needs.

Critical funding for preventive services or programs for children and families must be restored. 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 CPS and more costly systems and institutions such as foster care and juvenile justice. We encourage you to consider the following areas for restoration of funding in response to the cuts proposed in the Governor's Executive Budget.

Restore \$20 million in COPS funding, a category of funding within the child welfare 65/35 spending, thereby assuring these cross-systems programs connecting education, child welfare, mental health, and substance abuse services continue. These services are not "optional" they are critical and they achieve impressive outcomes for children. They include Healthy Families NY, Nurse-Family Partnership, Family Ties, Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection and many other worthy programs showing clear results. The Governor's Budget eliminates all COPS funding.

Restore the 25% reduction in Healthy Families New York, one of New York's evidence-based home visiting programs that prevents child abuse and reduces costs for foster care and other child welfare services. Healthy Families NY decreases child abuse and neglect. When these programs received an 8% cut in funding in August, 2008, 500 families lost services. And yet, an evaluation of these programs indicates they reduce incidents of abuse and neglect, improve parenting skills, and reduce the number of low birth weight newborns.

Restore funding to the William B. Hoyt Memorial Children and Family Trust Fund, a source of innovative preventive programming to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families. The programs funded by the Trust Fund represent locally-crafted solutions to locally-identified problems.

As citizens charged with reviewing the policies, procedures and practices in child protective services, we strongly believe that reforms can lead to cost savings and improve families' lives in New York State. Our recommendations for cost cutting are fully addressed in the Panels' 2008 Report and Recommendations. Highlights from those recommendations include:

- Eliminating anonymous reports.
- Eliminating education neglect reports.
- Reviewing statutory requirements for SCR clearances for the elimination of categories of reporters.

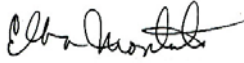
The full report and NYC Specific addendum are available online at: <http://www.citizenreviewpanelsny.org/AnnualReport.php> . A hard copy of the report was delivered to your office on January 26th.

We are available to meet with you or to talk with you should you have any questions. You can reach us by contacting Diane Mastin at 518-463-1896 ext. 24 or by email at dmastin@scaany.org. We thank you for your consideration.

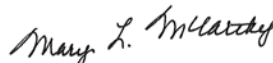
Sincerely,



David Lansner
Co-Chair
NYC panel



Elba Montalvo
Co-Chair
NYC Panel



Mary McCarthy
Chair
Eastern Panel



Ellen Kennedy
Chair
Western Panel