

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*

November 18, 2011

Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor of New York
Executive Chamber, State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

As Chairs of the three New York State Citizen Review Panels, we are writing to reiterate the importance of the Child Welfare Financing Law in keeping children safe by improving outcomes for New York's most vulnerable children and families, those who come in contact with the child welfare system. In 2012, the Child Welfare Financing Law is up for reauthorization. The New York State Panels make the following recommendations regarding this law and inclusion of a change in statute for educational neglect in your mandate relief package. We urge your inclusion of specific funding items within your Executive Budget.

Maintain open-ended, uncapped funding for prevention programs and return the state/local partnership to 75%/25%.

These services reduce the number of entries into costly foster care and hasten reunification for those placed in foster care. Even as the number of reports to the SCR increased by 10% over the past three years, a period of recession, the number of children in foster care continued to decline by 9% in that same time period. This funding has been instrumental in meeting the needs of families with primary prevention, protective, preventive, adoption, aftercare, and independent living services. New York's emphasis on community-based and in-home services is making a difference in avoiding more costly out-of-home placements. It is absolutely critical that this funding remain uncapped. Further, panel members recommend funding these services at a 75% state /25% local share, returning to the state/local partnership adopted in 1979 New York's Child Welfare Reform Act. New York State currently requires counties to bear 38% of the costs for preventive services, shifting an undue burden onto local communities at a time when property taxes have been capped. County budgets are under stress and local districts can no longer support this increased share.

Allow flexible funding for targeted services for at-risk populations without the need for a report to the State Central Register.

The panels call for funding within the Child Welfare Financing Law that can be used by local departments of social services to meet the needs of targeted populations identified as at-risk of placement into foster care, without the need of a report to the State Central Register. Such funding would allow local departments of social services to create an effective system of care using wrap-around services not easily met through existing funding streams. Funding must

allow for integrated services to meet the needs of children and their families across systems with shared outcomes between state agencies. Further, the recent passage of The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act (S1542/HR2883) directs states to describe in their state Child and Family Services Plans (Title IV-B plans) how the State identifies which populations are at greatest risk of maltreatment and to describe how the state will target services to those vulnerable populations.

Fund Kinship Guardianship Assistance as an uncapped permanency option with the same state/local share as adoption subsidies.

In 2010, New York adopted Kinship Guardianship Assistance as a new option for Title IV-E funding reimbursement under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. Implementation began on April 1, 2011. In the *2011-12 Budget*, funding for Kinship Guardianship Assistance was provided through the Foster Care Block Grant for one year; however, this funding stream is fully utilized by all counties to meet the needs of children in foster care. Another funding solution must be found. Panel members recommend that Kinship Guardianship Assistance be funded at the same rate as adoption subsidies since both methods represent viable permanency options.

Include in your mandate relief package, a change in statute to eliminate educational neglect as a bases for child protective reports for children 13 and older.

The Panels continue their support for the Vera Institute’s recommendation to “Seek statutory change to achieve new standards for youth demonstrating truant behavior where parental responsibility is not in question.” A more effective option is needed for engaging students who are chronically absent from school. Making this change will also free scarce child welfare resources for those cases where there is serious concern for a child’s safety.

As citizens charged with reviewing the policies, procedures and practices in child protective services, we strongly believe that early identification of at-risk families, provision of services that build strong families and support for families’ poverty-related needs can protect children from harm in the first instance and reduce re-entry into the child welfare system while saving the state money. We urge your support for this funding.

We thank you for your consideration.

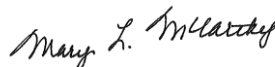
Sincerely,



David Lansner
Co-Chair
NYC panel



Elba Montalvo
Co-Chair
NYC Panel



Mary McCarthy
Chair
Eastern Panel



Ellen Kennedy
Chair
Western Panel

cc: Kristin Proud
Todd Scheuermann