

# Review of the Proposed 2013 Monroe County Budget: Executive Summary



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Children's Agenda is pleased to present this Executive Summary of our analysis of the proposed 2013 Monroe County budget, our 11th-annual such review. Our analysis looks at all sections of the budget where expenditures affect the health and well-being of children in Monroe County and identifies those areas in which County resources are serving children well and those in which additional resources, financial or otherwise, are needed. This document provides a brief overview of our main findings.

In short, the statistics for children in our community are shocking and heartbreaking. Trends in child poverty levels, infant mortality, and reports of child abuse and neglect are headed in the wrong direction. Monroe County has to walk a fine line between balancing the budget and providing services, but unfortunately our most vulnerable children bear the brunt of difficult spending choices. We commend the County for the continued positive downward trend of youth placements and for continuing to support and provide Building Healthy Children and the Nurse-Family Partnership. We have three areas of concerns: runaway and homeless youth services, child care subsidies, and the Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau.

Unfortunately, the limited amount of time provided by the County for review of the proposed budget makes it difficult to give detailed, meaningful feedback on specific budget line-items. For this reason, this Executive Summary addresses our most urgent findings in a general manner and recommends long-term, proactive measures that the County and community can address over the course of the next year. Our hope is that next year's proposed budget will show additional efforts to fund preventive, evidence-based services and an ever-more proactive approach to serving Monroe County's children and families.

## Summary of Recommendations

### RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH

- 1) Re-direct funds from a non-essential area of the County budget to increase capacity to serve youth in desperate circumstances through the Runaway and Homeless Youth program. Funding for RHY has fallen over \$200,000 (54%) since 2006, and it is assisting half the number of youths it served in 2007.*
- 2) Work with youth shelter providers to create a plan that would reduce and eventually eliminate the number of youth who sleep in adult shelters or hotels.*

### CHILD CARE

- 1) Initiate a collaborative process with child care providers, advocates, businesses, and consumers to develop and implement a plan for increasing child care subsidies for Monroe County residents.*
- 2) Monitor slots closely in 2013 to ensure that all NYS Child Care Block Grant funding is utilized and the maximum number of families are receiving assistance.*

### ROCHESTER-MONROE COUNTY YOUTH BUREAU

- 1) Convene a high-level table of community leaders, youth professionals, parents and youth to create a Youth Master Plan, coordinated across all sectors, to identify gaps and better leverage already-invested resources to improve kids' outcomes, from prenatal to age 21.*
- 2) Aggressively seek additional funding from public and private sources, including New York State, to enhance evidence-based programming offered by the Youth Bureau.*

## The State of Children in Monroe County

Monroe County prides itself on being one of the best places in the U.S. to live, yet the numbers tell a different story. Monroe County's own *County Child and Family Services Plan (2012 - 2016)*, written by the County Department of Human Services and submitted to the State, recognizes the downward trend for kids:

- Child poverty rates are increasing in both the City of Rochester and the County.
- Increasing numbers of children are living in single-parent households.
- Teen pregnancy numbers continue to exceed the state rate.
- The number of reports of child abuse and neglect continue to rise.
- The on-time graduation rate in the City of Rochester is just 42%.

Recent data show that things have grown even more dire since this report was submitted:

- The City of Rochester has the 7th highest rate of child poverty in the nation; more than half of its children live in poverty.
- One in every 4 kids in Monroe County live below the poverty line.
- Monroe County's infant mortality rate is 43% higher than New York State's infant mortality rate, and far above the rate in many developed nations.
- Monroe County's teen birth and STD rates are higher than those of New York City and the nation.

## Concerns About the Proposed 2013 Budget

### **Runaway and Homeless Youth**

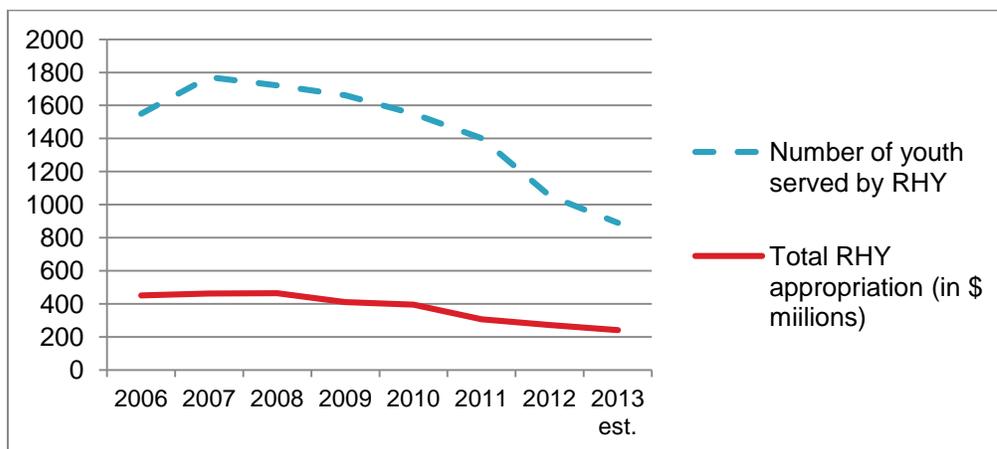
Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) dollars provide street outreach and beds in shelters for runaway and homeless youth. Funding in this year's proposed budget is down 11 percent since last year and 54 percent since 2006. As a result, 164 fewer

youth (16 percent) will receive services in 2013 as compared to 2012—and 882 fewer youth than in 2007. At the same time, service providers report that the number of homeless youth is on the rise.

Ultimately, the best solution to these problems is prevention through strengthening families, education, and health. Unfortunately, though, there will sometimes be children who ‘fall through the cracks,’ making a social safety net an imperative. Not only must we support children proactively by building into our community the supports and services all children need, but we must ensure that our most vulnerable (the most needy with the fewest resources) have a safe place to go in times of crisis. We need a local solution to funding runaway and homeless youth services.

### **KEY FINDINGS – RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH (RHY)**

- *The number of youth served has dropped from 1,772 in 2007 to a projected 890 in 2013, while the total appropriation for RHY dropped 54% from 2006 to 2013. This is particularly concerning because providers report an increased need for services for homeless youth.*



- *Agency contracts have dropped even more dramatically, with the largest decrease (\$107,000) occurring between 2012 and 2013.*
- *A full 50% of teens seeking emergency housing through the County Dept. of Human Services are placed in adult shelters or hotels.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS – RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH

- 1) Re-direct funds from a non-essential area of the County budget to increase capacity to serve youth in desperate circumstances through the Runaway and Homeless Youth program.*
- 2) Work with youth shelter providers to create a plan that would reduce and eventually eliminate the number of youth who sleep in adult shelters or hotels.*

### **Child Care Subsidies**

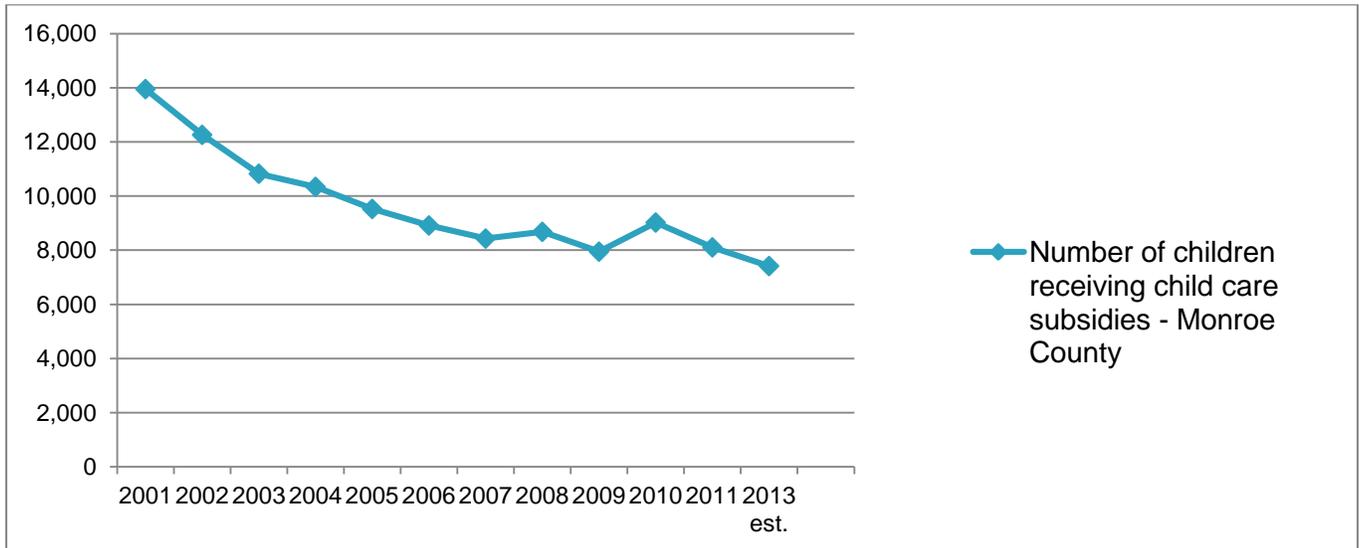
When children in families with low incomes attend high-quality child care, they accomplish more in school and in life. Their parents perform better at work. Taxpayers benefit, too. Every dollar invested in high-quality child care returns \$7 – \$17 in tax savings due to a reduction in services needed for children as they grow.

Child care subsidies are critically important because good child care is almost always prohibitively expensive for low-income working families, averaging \$14,000/year for center-based infant care in New York State. When a family no longer receives a child care subsidy, problems arise, including:

- Children can end up in substandard care, making them ill-prepared to enter primary school and setting them on a path for troubles later in life.
- Low-wage workers must either leave the workforce altogether or find alternative, often substandard, child care arrangements. These difficult choices increase worker absenteeism, decrease productivity as parents are distracted from their jobs by child care difficulties, and make it challenging for employers to find low-wage workers.
- Children are left home alone at an inappropriate age.

## KEY FINDINGS – CHILD CARE

- *There has been a loss of 6,535 child care subsidy slots in Monroe County since 2001 (13,950→7,415).*



- *There is a positive trend in the increasing percentage of subsidies used for day care centers and registered providers instead of legally exempt providers, indicating growth in the number of children in high quality settings.*
- *Rollover dollars in both Facilitated Enrollment and the NYS Child Care Block Grant will allow more families than expected to receive subsidies in 2013. We are concerned that the rollover dollars are a temporary infusion of funding. We appreciate the County exploring every available source to increase the number of children served; at the same time, we have lost 1/3 of the families being served over the last 9 years. We need a plan to permanently expand the number of badly needed child care subsidies in Monroe County.*
- *In 2012 the County projects that it will not draw its maximum allocation from NYS, leaving approximately 60 families who should have received subsidies*

*without them. While this represents just 1% of its budget, every dollar counts when ensuring that working families keep working and children have access to good education in the early years.*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS – CHILD CARE:

- 1) Initiate a collaborative process with County leaders, child care providers, business leaders, and advocates to develop a plan for increasing child care subsidies for Monroe County residents.*
- 2) Monitor slots closely in 2013 to ensure that all NYS Child Care Block Grant funding is utilized and the maximum number of families are receiving assistance.*

#### County Youth Bureau

The Greater Rochester community faces tremendous challenges that affect children individually and our community at large. Gang involvement here starts at the average age of 13. The incidence of violence among youth is deplorable and all too common. More Rochester teens die from homicide than from any other cause. Positive youth development can help decrease violence, deter juvenile delinquency, decrease teen pregnancy, and increase graduation rates. This is another area where prevention works and where investing in what is effective is critical.

The County has announced a renaming and re-positioning of the Youth Bureau; it will now be part of the Office for Positive Youth Development, which will in turn be merged with the Office for the Aging and housed within the new Division of Intergenerational Supports.

#### KEY FINDINGS – ROCHESTER–MONROE COUNTY YOUTH BUREAU

- As a variety of youth outcome indicators continue to decline, key preventive and youth development services impacting on youth are also declining*

*dramatically. The number of youth served by the Youth Bureau has fallen from 52,120 to 19,185 (65%) between 2004 and 2013.*

- *The total appropriation for the Youth Bureau drops 56% between 2004 and 2013 (inflation-adjusted).*
- *County support is down 25% during that same time period (inflation-adjusted).*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS – ROCHESTER–MONROE COUNTY YOUTH BUREAU**

- 1) *Convene a high-level table of community leaders, youth professionals, parents and youth to create a Youth Master Plan, coordinated across all sectors, to identify gaps and better leverage already-invested resources to improve kids' outcomes, from prenatal to age 21.* This would be an appropriate first effort of the County's newly-created Office for Positive Youth Development. Coordinated planning with other youth-focused efforts in Monroe County, such as ROC the Future, the Rochester City School's District's extended learning time initiative, and the Mayor's truancy program would improve the effectiveness of each initiative. Creating a Youth Master Plan is a critical approach that would allow city and county officials, school leaders, business and faith community leaders and other community partners, parents and youth to take stock of local programs and services for young people, identify cost savings, reduce duplication of services, develop evidence-based new initiatives, and strategically address pressing needs.
- 2) *Aggressively seek additional funding from public and private sources, including New York State, to enhance evidence-based programming offered by the Youth Bureau activities.*