

## Analysis of the Proposed 2014 Monroe County Budget



12/5/2013

In a very challenging budget year like this one, there should be tough conversations about allocating local tax dollars. Monroe County, like its neighbors, has a budget dominated by spending on mandated services. However, \$98.8 million of the budget is not mandated. How Monroe County chooses to spend that money defines our real priorities as a County. Smart spending cuts and sacrifices in some parts of the budget are necessary, but those areas chosen for cuts must be the least essential ones for our future success. In addition, the County has to aggressively pursue all other revenue for needed services, including federal and state funding, innovative new financing, or consider whether the services needed by our citizens warrant raising additional revenue. In making these critical choices, the use of evidence and analysis is imperative to ensure that dollars are spent as smartly as possible. None of us have any dollars to waste: not our County officials, not County taxpayers, and certainly not local families trying to meet their basic needs.

Well-respected research points out some answers and makes priorities clear: investing dollars upfront in preventive, high quality services for young children and their families gets the best bang for the taxpayer's buck. It's either "pay me now or pay me more later." High quality, preventive services for children and families yield high returns for taxpayer investment. For young children and their families, these include access to home-visiting programs and high quality early childhood education and care. The County has made important efforts on behalf of children this year; however, there are 3 critical changes that have to be made before it's too late and becomes even more expensive for County taxpayers later on:

1. Restore the \$1.3 million cut of local spending to the child care subsidy program and add a real boost of \$600,000 in local dollars over last year.
2. Commit to lobbying with community partners and advocates in Albany for increased state child care subsidy funding as an official priority for Monroe County in 2014.
3. Fully reinstate the evidence-based Parents as Teachers home-visiting program in the Department of Health.

### Other Key Findings and Recommendations

4. We commend the County for bringing together community partners to embark on a **Youth Master Plan** process in 2013. TCA was honored to be asked by the County to help facilitate this table.
5. **Juvenile Justice Reforms:** Good, hard work has resulted in a reduced number of children placed in juvenile detention. In addition, through the Office of Probation, the County is starting to plan for impending reforms. This important work should be expanded to incorporate all appropriate County departments to address the "Raise the Age" & "Close to Home" initiatives.
6. Collecting solid data on **Runaway and Homeless Youth** is critical to designing effective programming. The County should work with community providers to develop a method for tracking the number of youth seeking these services to identify needs and existing supports.
7. We thank the County Executive for stating "I am committed to NFP's [the **Nurse Family Partnership's**] sustainability and growth. We need to enroll not 300 but 1,000 families per year to reach all of the low income, first time families that need help in Monroe County..." We recommend that the County work with the NFP Community Advisory Board to pursue all opportunities and use new dollars to supplement, not supplant, current investments to serve more families to meet our County's need.
8. When creating Building Healthy Children, the County rightly invested upfront in evaluation. We recommend that this successful endeavor be built on by **incorporating evaluation** into a review of other critical services purchased with tax dollars that are delivered in the child welfare system.

### **The State of Children in Monroe County**

In 2013 a recurring theme in our local public dialogue has been the tale of two communities that co-exist within Monroe County. In one, children grow up in families with ample resources, enjoy opportunities to develop intellectually, physically and emotionally, and attend some of the best schools in the nation. In another, resources are scarce, families are stressed, and children often lack early learning experiences that prepare them well for school, so they enter kindergarten already behind their peers and often never catch up.

County policies and funding provide an opportunity to increase the valuable assets that both of these communities contribute to Monroe County's future and our shared destiny. Particularly critical are preventive strategies that, when implemented early in children's lives, narrow the gap, setting more children on a course for success.

### **Important Findings in the Proposed 2014 Budget**

**Disproportionate impact on children:** The total Operating Budget for the County is \$1 billion. In the proposed budget, the Operating Budget was reduced by \$3.8 m.<sup>1</sup> This includes a cut to the child care subsidy program of \$1.3 million, and the elimination of the Parents as Teachers program saves ~\$500k, equaling \$1.8 million in cuts directly impacting vulnerable children, a disproportionate 47% of the proposed \$3.8 million net cut to the County's entire 2014 operating budget.

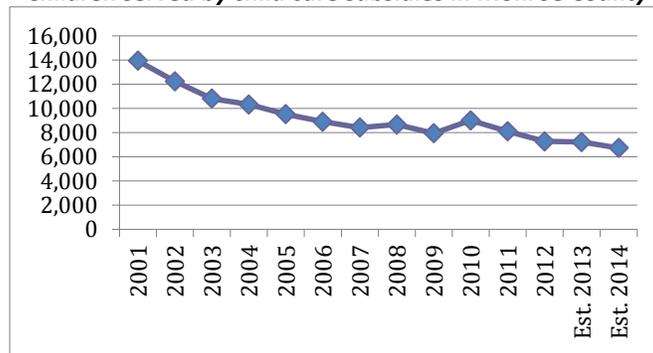
**Child care subsidies:** At least 2,450 people sent letters to County Executive Maggie Brooks to support the use of local tax dollars for child care subsidies and to advocate specifically for a \$1M increase in Monroe County funding for child care subsidies for low income, working families in 2014. This effort involved parents, leading business executives, community leaders, health care

<sup>1</sup> This total reduction is made up of a number of proposed increases and decreases across a variety of County departments.

professionals, and 93 Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and other faith communities. Unfortunately, in contrast, County Executive Maggie Brooks' 2014 budget proposal sharply reduces the level of local tax dollar investment in child care subsidies:

- The County Executive proposes to reduce the level of local tax dollars invested in child care subsidies by \$1.3M, from \$7.4 in 2013 to \$6.1M in 2014, an 18% one-year reduction. This is the least Monroe County has invested in child-care since 2007.
- The County budget projects that 485 fewer children will receive a subsidy in 2014.
- If the proposed 2014 budget is finalized with no changes to the child care subsidy program, Monroe County will have lost 7,203 child care subsidy slots since 2001 (13,950→ 6,747). The Children's Agenda estimates that at least 60% of the families needing child care subsidies – do not get them.
- Families who receive subsidies contribute their own funds in a parent co-pay.

**Children served by child care subsidies in Monroe County**



**Parents as Teachers:** The proposed 2014 budget eliminates the Department of Health's Parents as Teachers Perinatal Home Visiting Program ("PHVP"), an "evidence-based early childhood home visiting service delivery model," according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). This creates approximately \$500,000 in savings for the County next year, while creating longer-term, higher costs the County will have to pay down the road. The program has played a critical role in the Rochester area, serving vulnerable young families, many of whom would not be served by other home visiting services. Current enrollment in the program is 56 families (including 16 pregnant mothers), but in the past it served up to 150 families. Community programs which might help these families already have waiting lists.

**Youth Master Plan:** In our analysis of the 2013 budget, TCA recommended that Monroe County "convene a high-level table of community leaders... 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." We commend the County for taking the lead to do just that in 2013, resulting in a clear set of goals, selection criteria, and issues on which to collaborate across units of government. This is ready to move forward in 2014.

**Juvenile Justice Reform:** Use of detention for juveniles has decreased. This is important, good work. In addition, the Office of Probation will begin planning in 2014 for implementation of "Raise the Age" (where juvenile offenders will no longer be subject to adult incarceration). The "Close to Home" program, currently a State pilot in NYC, is a juvenile justice reform initiative designed to help keep youth in placement close to their home communities. It is anticipated that Close to Home will be implemented statewide in the future, resulting in the transfer of all youth currently in non-secure and limited-secure NYS facilities to local County facilities. Both Close to Home and Raise the Age will almost certainly be in place in Monroe County in 3-5 years,

and the County will be better prepared to take custody of these additional youth, preferably under the supervision of DHS, by starting its planning now. In addition, long term plans for the Children's Center are unclear. We recommend that both short term and long term plans ensure that these children and youth, many of whom are awaiting adjudication, are able to maintain contact with their families and law guardians who are critical to their well-being.

**Runaway & Homeless Youth:** National studies indicate a rise in the number of homeless youth. The County reports that fewer youth are seeking assistance, while at the same time the County budget projects that number will double. At the same time, New York State continues to reduce its commitment to this program. TCA joins local and state partners to advocate at a State level, so this cost will not simply be thrown at the feet of Monroe County taxpayers. But regardless of who pays the bill for this critical service for vulnerable youth, a good assessment of true need is necessary.

**Nurse Family Partnership:** The Nurse Family Partnership Program is an evidence-based home visitation program that has been proven to dramatically improve child and family outcomes, including reduced incidents of child abuse and neglect. The number of families served has remained essentially level for the past 3 years. We understand from the budget public hearing that there is continued level support and no cut to the NFP program in the proposed 2014 County Budget. We commend the County for diversifying NFP's funding streams to incorporate multiple Federal, State and local sources of funding and commend County Executive Brooks' commitment to expand the program. We appreciate the County's willingness to pursue creative financing, including writing a letter of support to the State for an application for Social Impact Bonds support for NFP. We urge the County to aggressively pursue additional dollars for NFP, including the NYS Medicaid Waiver and federal MIECHV part B. New dollars should supplement, not supplant, current funding in order to increase the number of families served.

**Evaluation of Purchased Services for Vulnerable Children and Families:** The number of children who have reports of maltreatment and abuse remains too high in our community. Importantly, the County provides vital services to help these children. We commend the County for the careful evaluation it has supported for Building Healthy Children to ensure the program is effective. We recommend that the County build on this model and share numbers served, degree of evidence-base, and existing evaluations of its additional Preventive/Protective and Community Optional Preventive Service Contracts. Resources for prevention and protection are essential; it makes sense to invest in what has been evaluated and proven to work.

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