

Review of the Proposed 2016 Monroe County Budget



December 2015

Executive Summary

TheChildren'sAgenda

Smart Choices. Bold Voices.

1 S. Washington St., Suite 400, Rochester, NY 14614
TheChildrensAgenda.org

The Children's Agenda

Smart Choices. Bold Voices.

Review of the Proposed 2016 Monroe County Budget EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Children's Agenda offers this review of the proposed 2016 County budget and its impact on children and youth as a contribution to the local dialogue about how to best use limited resources to create a thriving community for families and children.

2016 is an important year for Monroe County's children and youth. 2015 brought remarkable progress in aligning community leadership and resources in pursuit of systemic change that we hope will reverse the persistent and troubling negative trends around child poverty, school success and children's health. **We commend the County for being involved in these initiatives and we urge County leaders to take advantage of current community initiatives to marshal public policies and funding around evidence-based strategies that will strengthen families and improve children's well-being.**

The State of Children in Monroe County

At the heart of these new initiatives is a concern that the future of our community is at risk. ROC the Future's annual 2015 State of Our Children Report Card reported some real improvements in school attendance and college financial aid application rates among Rochester City School District students, but other indicators continue to be troubling:

- Competency rates for New York State Math exams are 15% countywide and 1%-9% among Rochester students. The percentage of students showing competency in English in grades 3 – 8 averages 30% countywide and 4-7% in Rochester.
- 23% of children in Monroe County are living in poverty, including 53% of children in Rochester, continuing an upward trend over the past 5 years.
- Monroe County serves only 22% of children eligible for child care assistance, and the need for subsidies in Monroe County is growing fastest in suburbs.
- 70% of surveyed Monroe County high schools students experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Event (ACE) in their life. Research indicates that one or more ACE increases the risk for medical, mental, and social problems as an adult.

Recommendations

With these indicators in mind, we analyzed the Proposed 2016 Monroe County Budget and recommend the following policy and funding changes to improve child outcomes.

Child Welfare/Preventive Services: *In response to the rise in local child abuse and neglect reports and the number of children in foster care, we recommend:*

1. Enacting a County policy so that vacant Child Protective Service (CPS) caseworker positions are filled automatically until caseloads drop to levels recommended by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and national child welfare organizations. In the meantime, immediately increase the number of Department of Human Services (DHS) CPS caseworkers.
2. Ensuring adequate funding for contracted preventive services, to maintain and expand evidence-based strategies for at-risk children and families.

3. Increasing the number of CPS-involved families referred to the Family Assessment Response (FAR) program and increase funding for wraparound services to increase family success and avoid out-of-home placements.
4. Restoring funding to Preventive/Protective day care so that children of families in crisis can access safe, quality, consistent child care as needed.
5. Urging New York State leaders to lift the current moratorium on Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS) in the 2016-17 budget and increase its allocation to expand access to preventive programs that demonstrate positive research-based outcomes.
6. Collaborating with the Medicaid Redesign maternal and child health project and the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative to scale up evidence-based home visiting programs (Nurse Family Partnership, Building Healthy Children, and Parents as Teachers) to meet our community's need.

Child care: *In response to the continued decrease of children served by child care subsidies and expected cuts coming as a result of new federal regulations, we recommend:*

7. Re-convening the Day Care Advisory Council, including County staff, providers, parents, local researchers and advocates to consult regularly with County staff on the child care subsidy program. Issues that should receive priority consideration include overall program functioning, parent copayment levels, and a graduated transition off of child care assistance as family income increases.

Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education: *In response to a lack of qualified providers and significant billing issues, we recommend:*

8. Strengthen the staffing infrastructure in the Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education programs in the Dept. of Health to provide more oversight of the billing and reimbursement process, especially for Early Intervention, with a goal of enhancing service provider recruitment and retention.

Juvenile Justice: *In response to the likely enactment of the NY State Raise the Age legislation, we recommend:*

9. Convening stakeholders to plan for appropriate services and ensure adequate resources are available to serve local youth ages 16 and 17 involved in the criminal justice system.

Commendations

We commend Monroe County leadership for:

- **Innovative provision of the Family Assessment Response model of services for families in the Child Protective Services system:** We commend the County for embracing the Family Assessment Response (FAR) as an alternative to traditional CPS investigations for low-risk families, and for conducting an evaluation of the program.
- **Supporting Provider Quality in Child Care and Early Education:** We commend Monroe County for continuing to offer accredited child care providers a higher payment.

Important Findings in the Proposed 2016 Budget

Child Welfare/Preventive Services

1. **Reports of child maltreatment have increased 20% since 2008.** Reports of child maltreatment have been trending upward since 2008 and are projected to increase again in 2016. The County projects that there will be 8,925 reports of child abuse and neglect in 2016—1,260 more than in 2014, an increase of 16%. The Monroe County Federation of Social Workers IUE-CWA Local 81381 announced in July that CPS reports in May 2015 were up 13% compared to May 2014, and a comparison of June 2014 with June 2015 revealed an even larger 27% rise in the number of reports. While some of the increase can be attributed to a change from the local to the New York State child abuse hotline which took effect in May 2015, these substantial increases indicate a more troubling cause.
2. **County staffing levels for Child Protective Investigative Staff are not meeting National and New York State Standards.** There is inadequate staff capacity in the Department of Human Services' Child Protective Services (CPS) to provide appropriate investigations and services for families where there is a risk of child maltreatment or abuse. Despite a recommended national standard of 12 families per worker, the New York State Office of Child and Family Services (NYS OCFS) reported that 35% of Monroe County workers had 16 or more investigations on their caseload on the last day of each month for January 2015 – June 2015. It is important to note that this time period does not fully reflect the substantial increase in reports that began in May 2015.

In addition to more reports, there are vacant positions in CPS. Monroe County's 2015 update to its Child and Family Services Plan states "DHS continues to have significant vacancies in caseworkers in CPSI, . . . The mean monthly caseload per workers increased from 13.4 in 2013 to 16.5 in 2014." Leaving these important positions unfilled creates tremendous stress on the current workers.

3. **Services for families at risk of abuse and neglect are flat-funded, despite increasing need.** The increase in reports of child maltreatment and an uptick in foster care placements indicate a need for more and better preventive services, yet funding for Protective/Preventive services remains level (after adjusting for a shift of \$2.4 M to Probation).

Child care

4. **The number of children receiving child care subsidies has decreased 53% since 2001.** Child care subsidy local funding is maintained at the mandated County contribution (\$4.2M); 276 fewer children will be served in 2016, representing a 4% decrease from 2015 and a 53% decline since 2001. Preventive/Protective child care is cut \$120,000; this program allows the County to assist families in crisis, often identified through a Child Protective Services report, by providing funds to enroll children in care. A positive change is that eligibility for the Income Eligible child care subsidy program has been raised from 165% of the federal poverty level to 200%, though the County states that it will continue to prioritize families earning less than 165%.

Juvenile Justice/Adolescent Care

5. **More troubled youth are detained.** Monroe County reported at the November Human Services Committee that there has been an increase in the number of youth subject to a "Persons in Need of Supervision" or PINS petition who experience detention in non-secure beds. The 2016 JD/PINS Care allocation is increased 56% in the proposed 2016 budget, from \$5.9 M to \$9.1 M, because of these costly detentions.

6. **Inadequate planning for change in juvenile justice policy.** The proposed Raise the Age initiative – which will allow New York’s 16- and 17-year-old youth involved in the criminal justice system to serve their sentences in juvenile facilities - is very likely to pass both houses and be signed into law by Gov. Cuomo, but Monroe County has proposed no adjustments in funding or policy to prepare for this change.

Local Initiatives

There are three major local efforts underway in the Greater Rochester area, all of which include a goal of improving outcomes for children, youth, and families. These initiatives provide County leadership a chance to work collectively to pursue systemic change by creating additional partnerships and alignment among public and private entities serving children:

- **The Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI)** is dedicated to ensuring that “every child and family has the opportunity to live in a stable environment where the promise of economic mobility is a reality,” with a specific goal of reducing poverty in Rochester by 50% in 15 years. A Summer 2015 process that brought together community members and leaders identified 33 recommendations of what must change to reach the initiative’s anti-poverty goals. Three areas were selected for early implementation: Early Childhood Support, Adult Mentoring/Navigating, and Systems Design (Designing a comprehensive, integrated system of social supports).
- **ROC the Future (RtF)** is a collaborative community-wide initiative. Conveners include Monroe County, the City of Rochester, the Rochester Area Community Foundation, Monroe Community College, the United Way, the Rochester City School District and other leading organizations, and The Children’s Agenda serves as the backbone entity. RtF’s mission is to promote alignment and focus community resources to improve the academic achievement of children in the City of Rochester. ROC the Future presents an annual Report Card to report in the status of children on a variety of community indicators along the cradle to career educational continuum.
- **The Medicaid Redesign process known as Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP)** was initiated by Governor Cuomo in 2014 and is aimed at expanding preventive services to avoid costly hospitalizations. The region which includes Monroe County successfully applied to fund an expansion of Nurse Family Partnership by an additional 100 families and 4 nurses in Monroe County and serve an additional 175 families in 7 additional counties in 2016.

Summary

We urge County leaders to act on our recommendations to improve outcomes for children and families, as we all strive to ensure a thriving Monroe County.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to The Children’s Agenda Board for their support and guidance. In particular, we thank TCA’s Policy Committee under whose direction this analysis and report was conducted: Jane G. Lynch, Chair; Albert Blankley, Jacque Cady, Ed Doherty, Dr. Andrew Doniger, Lois Giess, Bryan Hetherington, Diane Larter, Caroline Merenda, Don Pryor, R. Danforth Ross, Kristin Small.

For More Information

We encourage you to read the full analysis and report, available online at our website: www.thechildrensagenda.org. Questions can be directed to Brigit Hurley, Policy Analyst at bhurley@thechildrensagenda.org.