TheChildren'sAgenda

Smart Choices. Bold Voices.

Executive Summary: Analysis of the Proposed 2020 Monroe County Budget

The Children's Agenda offers this review of the proposed 2020 County budget and its impact on children and youth with two audiences in mind: County legislators who will vote on its proposals, and the new County administration who will have the opportunity to make changes in County policy and funding beyond 2020.

In this report, we provide priority recommendations and commendations for Monroe County's 2020 Proposed Budget and for the County as it enters a new decade. We hope this review will move us toward our community's shared goal of ***making Monroe County the best place in the state of New York to raise a family***.

Priority Recommendations for Immediate Action

1) Develop new recruitment and retention strategies to increase Child Protective Services (CPS) staffing until the average caseload ratio is 12:1.
2) Collaboratively engage community partners and learn from cutting-edge CPS districts across the country to institute new, best-practice protocols to strengthen CPS-involved families and prevent future child maltreatment.
3) Ensure preventive dollars are spent on the most effective programs and services by evaluating current spending.
4) Pilot a study of child maltreatment cases in Monroe County to determine root causes that can be addressed by new and re-directed public and private investments.
5) Adopt new policies and practices to strengthen the child care program.
6) Increase Preschool Special Education rates by an additional 15% to retain current providers and recruit more.
7) Hire an additional four more Service Coordinators for the County's Early Intervention program.

Priority Findings in the Proposed 2020 Budget

The proposed 2020 Monroe County budget includes:

- *An increase in state child care funding and a decrease in County spending results in net total increase of $541,791*. This results from a rise of $1.67 million in combined federal and state funding and a reduction of $1.13 million in County funds. The higher appropriation will be needed to cover an increase in market rates paid to providers that was effective as of May 1, 2019 and a reduction in parent co-payments. $200,000 is allocated out of URI child care dollars to support a new emergency child care opportunity created in partnership with the Center for Youth Services. The County projects a slight increase in the number of subsidies provided.
- *More support for children with special needs*: An increase in total spending of $720,324 (4%) for Special Children's Services, which includes the Preschool Special Education (PSE) and Early Intervention (EI) programs. This will fund the 15% rate increase in the PSE program approved in March 2019 and six additional service coordinators for the EI program.
- *Rising foster care placements:* New foster care placements have risen 24% since 2017, despite 2 years of significant expansion in programs to prevent these placements.
- *Child Protective Services reports are expected to reach 11,000 – averaging 30 reports every day in 2020:* This upward trend, persistent despite recent reforms, is alarming and merits a close examination of alternative strategies. Previous experience shows that after investigation, about 25% of these reports (2,750 in 2020) will be "founded", indicating that children have experienced neglect, physical or sexual abuse.

The Children's Agenda's Recommendations for the Decade Ahead

We offer these recommendations to the new County administration as overarching themes to guide their work in 2020 and beyond.

1. ***IMPROVE*** collaborative problem-solving, service delivery and cross-sector planning through increased public transparency. Effective partnerships work best when trust and transparency are present. The County has a seat at many community tables but too often has been a reluctant participant. The Children's Agenda believes it is important for the Bello administration to be pro-active in sharing data and information, to establish benchmarks and lead collaborative action for change.

2. ***MAXIMIZE County spending to leverage federal, state and private dollars***. Instead of viewing federal and state program funding as mandates, view them opportunities to bring additional dollars into our community long-term. We urge exploration and deeper investments in programs like Community Optional Preventive Services, the Child & Adult Care Food Program, NYS Education Department Community Schools, etc.

3. ***FOCUS on prevention, not remediation.*** The best use of County taxpayers' dollars is to prevent children's problems from developing into bigger and more expensive problems down the road. Monroe County Dept. Of Human Services spends $20+ million on preventive services but only half of those dollars are used to deliver programs with a proven track record of success. Toward that end, getting evidence-based, front-end programs up to scale and integrated with others (such as home visiting with early intervention screening and services, early intervention with child care, etc.) will save the high costs of remediation in the years ahead.

4. ***LEAD inter-municipal and public/private partnerships***. There are many "tables" in our community to split County focus, time and attention on children and family issues, and our community has many programs and organizations to help children — one by one, or year by year. The Children's Agenda suggests that Monroe County create what other state and local governments have successfully used: a high-level body to synthesize siloed efforts and focus on helping to change the system for all children, particularly the most vulnerable. Initiatives for such an inter-municipal and public/private partnership could include data-sharing agreements between the County, City, Rochester City School District and service providers; an annual "State of Our Children" address co-led by the County Executive, Mayor, Town Supervisors, and School Superintendents; or creating a Children's Cabinet.

5. ***REFORM decades of inequitable policy, starting with a thorough racial equity impact analysis of County spending.*** County government has implementation authority in systems that have historically inflicted much harm on children of color through implicit bias and racism, e.g. Juvenile Justice and Child Protective Services. Some steps have been taken to address this in recent years, such as Disproportionate Minority Representation (DMR) staff training and a 2016 pilot of a Blind Removal Process with CPS teams to assess their disproportionate impact on minority families. But those efforts are isolated, episodic examples that need the reinforcement of a broader, systematic, and consistent approach such as an annual racial equity impact assessment.