



Leadership, voice and vision for child welfare in New York State

**Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies
Testimony Submitted by Mary Jane Dessables
Joint City Council Hearing**

**Committee on Contracts, Committee on Finance, and the Subcommittee on Capital Budget
Oversight Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2022,
Capital Commitment Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025 and
The Fiscal 2021 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report
March 2, 2021**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Kallos, Chairperson Dromm, and Chairperson Rosenthal. I am Mary Jane Dessables and I am the Director of Information, Research, and Accountability of the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA). Our member agencies include over fifty not-for-profit organizations providing foster care, adoption, family preservation, and juvenile justice services in New York City and over 100 agencies providing the same services Statewide. On behalf of our member agencies, their thousands of employees, and mostly on behalf of the tens of thousands of children and families that our agencies serve, we thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the child welfare workforce, along with the general human services workforce, has continuously provided vital assistance to New York City residents. Our child welfare heroes in Prevention and Foster Care programs supplied families with food and necessities, connected students with remote classes, cared for youth who became ill with the virus, and so much more. They went into communities and to clients' homes and placed themselves at unknown risk, and for salaries well below what the 2019 New York City Self-Sufficiency Standard cites as minimum for the City's most affordable borough.

Now, as we look forward to entering a recovery phase, New York City will need its human services organizations more than ever. But for the agencies to be able to help the City, the City must ensure the agencies have the resources to do the work. Along with the Human Services Council and the general human service sector, we ask for three things:

1. Bring back the COLA for City-contracted service workers at a rate of at least 3%.
The City Budget created a three-year COLA in FY18 that expired in FY20 and was not renewed in the FY21 budget, effectively expecting essential workers to continue doing their work in the midst of a pandemic despite the increased need for their services and the increased risk they undertook to meet these needs. A minimum 3% is needed for the underpaid and overworked human services workforce.
2. Provide comprehensive emergency pay for human services workers.
The City's child welfare agencies continued to do the hard work to keep children safe and well-cared-for for the past year. The work changed, sometimes radically, as the pandemic continued, and they were at times forced to do this work with limited PPE, limited transportation options, and limited supplies. Some of the agencies received funding to provide emergency pay for their

hard-working staff, but not all programs were able to access this benefit. The City must provide *all* frontline human services workers emergency pay retroactive to March 23, 2020, when the stay-at-home order for non-essential employees was enacted.

3. Fully restore Indirect Cost Rate (ICR) funding for FY20, FY21, and going forward.

You have heard from COFCCA regularly over the years about the true cost of providing the City with the services for which it contracts. Our agencies have long struggled with meeting contract requirements while at the same time struggling to cover organizational costs to run the programs. Years of “savings” on operational costs, such as keeping an old technology infrastructure or putting off workplace improvements, caught up with organizations in 2020; suddenly agencies needed a technology infrastructure that could handle remote workers, suddenly worksites needed to have barriers between workers and upgraded ventilation systems. The City has done the work to identify the true costs of doing business; it is not fair for the City to not provide the funding that allows the agencies to claim the true costs, and it endangers agencies’ viability.

When it comes down to it, the City puts itself at risk by withholding funding for these three areas. Without a stable, supported workforce and a strong, supported network of human services agencies, the City will be unable to fully recover from COVID-19 – and will not be prepared for the next crisis.

I would be happy to answer any questions the Council members may have, and I thank you for allowing me to submit our testimony. We thank you for your ongoing partnership to support the children and families of New York, and our provider organizations.

~~~~~  
Contact Information:

Mary Jane Dessables, Director of Information, Research, and Accountability

Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies

254 West 31st Street, Fifth Floor, New York, NY 10001

Phone: (212) 929-2626

[mjdessables@cofcca.org](mailto:mjdessables@cofcca.org)