



New York Public Welfare Association, Inc.

Founded in 1869

130 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12210
Paul Brady, *Executive Director*

518-465-9305
www.nypwa.org

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Assistant Secretary Emily Badalamente
Assistant Secretary Alyson Grant-Tarek
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

Assistant Secretaries Badalamente and Grant-Tarek:

The New York Public Welfare Association (NYPWA) wanted to thank you for meeting with us on October 10, 2023 to discuss our shared priorities heading into the 2023-24 state budget season. The upcoming year presents equal amounts of challenge and opportunity—and we look forward to working together to best serve vulnerable members of our communities.

As you know, the NYPWA represents the 58 local departments of social services (LDSS) statewide. Local districts are often the last resort for those seeking housing, child welfare services and other assistance. The following is a summary of the topics we discussed during our meeting, as well as some other issues that were not fully addressed.

Medicaid

Although discussed only in passing, it must be noted that Medicaid is the largest expense in a county's budget—and the longstanding administrative cap and eFMAP savings have helped keep Medicaid costs and property taxes in check. That said, the state's unexpected move to intercept all future Affordable Care Act (ACA) enhanced federal Medicaid Assistance Percentage (eFMAP) funds—and the confusion surrounding eFMAP reconciliations and the timing of the ACA-related phaseout—has strained already tight county budgets. Local districts have been active partners with the state during the ongoing state takeover of Medicaid Administration. Now is not the time to shift Medicaid costs onto counties. Local investments in human services for children and families and other vital services will be jeopardized as a result.

Housing and Safety Net Assistance

Perhaps no other issue looms as large for local districts as the growing emergency housing crisis and the need for a new approach to the problem. When people live without shelter, or in temporary shelter, their circumstances are exacerbated by antiquated funding policies that keep them trapped in poverty. For instance, it was roughly two decades ago when the public

assistance rental allowance was last increased. In response, the NYPWA **recommends** the following:

- Restore the state Safety Net Assistance (SNA) share from 29% back to 50%.
- Restore the state share of administration for SNA and SNAP from 0% back to 50%.
- Raise Family Assistance and SNA allowances for shelter, basic needs & home energy.
- Calculate Code Blue allocations using methodology that better represent current & future needs—including the influx of migrants statewide and indexed annually to account for inflation. It is also important to provide adequate support and regulatory flexibility to districts to better ensure the safety of provider staff and residents.

Child Care

The NYPWA fully supports Governor Hochul's efforts to make child care a priority. Access to quality, affordable child care is essential for every family—especially those living on low incomes and tight budgets. In recent years, the state has expanded child care eligibility—supported, in part, by temporary federal pandemic dollars. However, eligibility is just one side of the child care coin. To maintain and build on the progress already made, the NYPWA **recommends** the following:

- Commit multi-year funding so counties can set long term programming to help prevent the need for waitlists.
- Continue to address loss of providers to counteract 'child care deserts'.

Child Welfare

Safe, affordable housing and child care can help ensure a child's future. However, when families struggle, the state and local districts share the common goal of supporting children at home and preventing costly child welfare placements. To better reach this goal, the NYPWA **recommends** the following:

- Maintain open-ended child welfare funding and restore preventive services to 65% state share—as required by existing statute—for the non-federal share of child protective services, preventive services, independent living, aftercare, and adoption administration services.
- Carve KinGap and the increased rates stemming from the state's MSAR legal settlement out of the Foster Care Block Grant (FCBG).
- Coordinate OPWDD, OMH, and OCFS to better serve children with complex needs and avoid lengthy hospital and residential stays.

Workforce

LDSS staff are on the frontlines of making sure people have housing, food, health care, child welfare services, and other assistance. Unfortunately, districts are facing staff burnout, widespread vacancies, and a high number of provisional appointments. The NYPWA thanks the Governor, and our state agency partners, for introducing the Hiring for Emergency Limited

Placement (HELP) Program, which removed the civil service exam requirement for a wide range of public workforce titles. HELP's success demonstrated the need to modernize civil service. Without sufficient staff, the ability to provide assistance is jeopardized. That is why the NYPWA **recommends** an extension of HELP and the addition of more titles—especially clerical and accounting titles.

These are all complicated policy and fiscal issues, and we truly appreciate the Governor's Office and Division of Budget for their leadership and willingness to delve into the complexity with us to pursue long-term solutions. We look forward to working with you on these and other issues facing our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Brady", with a stylized, cursive script.

Paul Brady
Executive Director

CC: Jesse Olczak, Chief Budget Examiner, DOB
Jihoon Kim, Deputy Secretary for Human Services & Mental Hygiene