

Submitted Testimony
Of
Jacqueline A. Negri, Executive Director
Association of New York State Youth Bureaus

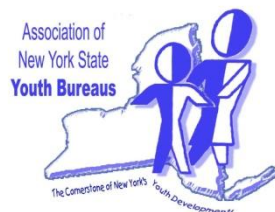
February 4, 2015

Before
The Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services
NYS Legislative Office Building

John A. DeFrancisco, Chairman, Senate Finance
Committee

and

Herman D. Farrell, Jr., Chairman, Assembly Ways and
Means Committee



Testimony before the Joint Legislative Hearing on the Human
Services Budget

On behalf of the network of youth bureaus that guide and provide a wide array of youth development services, the Association of New York State Youth Bureaus (ANYSYBs) offers recommendations regarding the 2015-16 *Executive Budget*. These recommendations have been developed in response to the Executive Budget proposal and any questions about these positions can be directed to Jackie Negri, Executive Director of the Association (jackie@nycap.rr.com).

Summary of Budget Priorities:

Add a total of \$2.4 million to the **Youth Development Program** – to be used as follows:

1. Restore \$1.285 million to the **Youth Development Program** to maintain the SFY 2014-15 levels for the old YDDP/SDPP programs. This action will support the continuing smooth transition of the county, town and village youth bureau system to the new Youth Development Program which cannot be maintained without a minimum of \$15.3 million.
2. Add \$1.115 million to the **Youth Development Program** to support additional community based services such as, juvenile justice diversion, delinquency recidivism, family engagement, and post-detention case management.

Add a total of \$2.4 million to the **Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)** program to be used as follows -

3. Restore \$254, 456.00 for the **Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)** programs to maintain SFY 2014-15 levels.
4. Including the restoration, add \$2.4 million for **Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)** to address the needs of a specific homeless population: unaccompanied minors or the runaway and homeless youth population.

Restore \$500,000 to the **Advantage After-school Program**

5. Restore \$500,000 for the **Advantage After-school** program to maintain SFY 2014-2015 levels.

Support the proposed **Raise the Age** phase-in and the initial \$25 million investment in diversion and probation services.

Budget testimony:

Thank you for continuing to support the transition of the Youth Development Program from the old the YDDP and SDPP funding streams into a single Youth Development Program. As you will recall, the funding for the old programs had dropped from \$39 million in 2008, to just \$14.1 million. The Executive Budget again proposes only \$14.1 million for the Youth Development Program, the Legislature has steadfastly added \$1.285 million to maintain the program at \$15.3 million since 2009. This year we urge that you include the restoration, but that you add a total of \$2.4 million (the traditional restoration of \$1.285 million and an additional \$1.115 million). The additional funding is critical to ensure that each county is doing as much community-based juvenile justice diversion, delinquency recidivism prevention, family engagement and post-detention care management as possible. These services are not available in every county, but they should be.

We urge the Legislature to address an oversight in the proposed Executive Budget as it pertains to Homeless Assistance and Services. Despite significant investments proposed for homeless services in general, there is not specific support for unaccompanied minors or the runaway and homeless youth population. We urge the Legislature to address the need for increased programming and services for these vulnerable youth, as served by the RHYA programs. Runaway and homeless youth often fall between the cracks of the child welfare system and the adult homeless systems. Runaway and homeless youth shelters provide for the basic needs of thousands of homeless youth throughout New York each year. There are currently 950 beds in RHY programs to serve an estimated 59,791 homeless youth (according to the 2012 OCFS RHY Annual Report). In essence, even with the slight restoration by the Legislature of \$254,500.00 to maintain last year's funding level, the current funding supports 60% fewer beds and services than was possible in 2008. When RHY shelter is not available, youth are

referred to the adult homeless shelters; not a developmentally appropriate setting for vulnerable youth.

We urge the Legislature to add \$4.7 million to the RHYA program this year to address youth homelessness as a priority within the significant homelessness assistance expansion proposed in the *Executive Budget*.

The end product of a strong youth development system is to offer skills that build our state's citizenry, including: supporting timely High school graduation, providing career and job readiness training, teaching civic responsibility and diverting juvenile violators from entering or re-entering the delinquency system. To achieve these goals, youth bureaus provide direct services and also fund an array of community-based, non-profit agencies. Funding supports programs and services that build youth's skills that allow them to graduate from high school, receive career and job readiness training, learn civic responsibility and prevent juvenile violators from re-entering the delinquency system; including:

- Afterschool prevention programs
- Out-of-school job readiness and summer jobs
- Healthy eating and obesity prevention
- Mentoring programs
- Programs to prevent youth involvement in gangs and substance use; and
- Supports for runaway and homeless youth as well as pregnant and parenting teams

For these reasons we ask you to support:

- Restoring \$500,000 to the Advantage After-school program
- Supporting the proposed \$30 million for Summer Youth Employment Program

- Supporting the proposed \$25 million to plan, create and expand services to support diversion and probation supports for 16 and 17 year old youth who may be diverted from the correctional system into the existing juvenile justice system if the reforms proposed to the juvenile jurisdiction system are accepted.

The Association strongly supports the Governor's recommendation to Raise the Age in accordance with the recommendations of the Commission on Youth, Public Safety and Justice. The Article VII bills that will redesign the juvenile justice system are supported by the ANYSYBs. The initial \$25 million investment proposed to support the expansion of diversion services that promote positive youth development and allow for the training and hiring of family engagement specialists are top priorities for the ANYSYBs because families must understand and support the youth's participation in the diversion services for maximum effectiveness. In addition, many of the evidenced-based interventions that are most successful in preventing recidivism are family-focused and require family participation. The changes to the court system and sentencing guidelines drive much of the legislation, while capital funding will be necessary to place newly sentenced 16 and 17 year old youth with OCFS instead of in adult correctional facilities. Therefore, the ANYSYBs also supports the \$110 million in capital funding proposed.

Lastly, we raise the issue of childhood obesity prevention as a continuing priority. We ask that you support the proposed \$250,000 in grant funding to have nonprofit organizations enroll children in federal food and nutrition programs. The participation of youth in summer and afterschool programs that not only promote healthy eating, but also encourage regular activity, have resulted in better school performance and the development of lifelong wellness skill building. Research emphasizes that healthy eating and activity habits are formed at the earliest ages. We must

do more to influence childhood behavior as it relates to exercise, activity and nutrition. We hope you will agree that by adding nutrition and exercise programming to existing youth opportunity services, we can reach youth individually and influence their independent knowledge of health eating, food selection and the value of regular exercise.

Thank you for your consideration of these important youth development requests.