

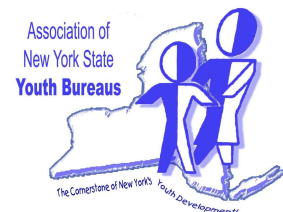
**Testimony
Of
Jacqueline A. Negri, Executive Director
Association of New York State Youth Bureaus
and
Frank Williams, Jr., Executive Director
City of White Plains Youth Bureau and
Board Member, Association of NYS Youth Bureaus
January 14, 2009**

**Before
The Joint Fiscal Committees of the NYS Legislature
on the 2009-2010 Executive Budget**

**Carl Kruger, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
Liz Krueger, Vice Chairperson, Senate Finance Committee**

and

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



Good morning honorable chairman and other distinguished members of the Legislature. My name is Jackie Negri and I am the Executive Director of the Association of New York State Youth Bureaus (ANYSYB) and with me today is Frank Williams, Executive Director, of the City of White Plains Youth Bureau and an ANYSYB Board Member.

ANYSYB represents New York's Youth Bureau Systems which is comprised of 109 county and municipal youth bureaus providing quality youth development, prevention, intervention services to over 2 million youth, from rural towns and villages, to small cities and urban centers since 1945. The youth bureau system embodies the definition of youth development as an ongoing process in which children and adolescents seek ways to meet their personal and social needs, build life skills and competencies that allow them to be successful and learn how to function effectively in their daily lives. Positive youth development services include, but are not limited to programs that build skills to prepare New York's youth for graduation, work, and civic responsibilities and to prevent them from entering the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Youth Bureaus and their providers offer school drop-out prevention programs, worker readiness and summer jobs, mentors, supports for runaway and homeless youth, pregnant and parenting teens and youth involved with drugs and gangs and leadership training for civic engagement.

For over 60 years, New York State's Youth Bureau system has provided youth prevention, intervention and development services and programs to more than 2 million young people under the age of 21 throughout the state – nearly half of the youth population.

Understanding the troubling fiscal and economic climate in New York State, there is no doubt that tough decisions need to be made however, crisis brings opportunity. And we believe there is an opportunity for the transformation of youth prevention, intervention and development services in New York State without dismantling the current system. Unfortunately, the SFY 2009-10 Executive's Proposed Budget does just that – dismantles the current effective, cost-efficient long standing youth bureau service system in New York State which provides youth development and prevention services to over two million youth to age 21. The proposal dismantles the youth bureau system by absolving New York State from oversight and muddling detention services with prevention services through a county block grant.

- First, the proposal recommends a **January 1, 2009 effective date**, which leaves many youth bureaus and programs uncertain of funding and of their existence. This timeline puts youth bureaus in the predicament of either informing community-based programs and services with whom they contract, such as YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and others that their contracts cannot be administered based on the possibility that prevention services for youth coordinated through the youth bureau may not only suffer draconian cuts *but may not be allocated at all*. As a result, community-based services preparing for immediate closure will leave those that are homeless, high-risk kids and many others under the age of 21 without their network of supports, programs and services. Transformation of the system, coupled with cost savings, is certainly something youth bureaus and other youth advocates would like to work on collaboratively during this economic climate however, ***dismantling an effective system without due process and time for prudent review has many unintended consequences for the safety and well-being of all youth.***

- Second, the proposal absolves the New York State Office of Children and Family Services' responsibility of youth development and prevention by allowing for a county block grant approach that will be disjointed, county by county, with no state oversight and no accountability to youth prevention services. The proposal would eliminate the current youth bureau system as it stands in Executive Law 420, Article 19a and proposes a block grant where the Chief Executive Officer of a municipality designates the lead agency for the purposes of administering the grant. The proposed block grant of services combines youth prevention and intervention services (*Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention Program – YDDP; Special Delinquency Prevention Program – SDPP; Runaway and Homeless Youth Act – RHYA; Alternatives to Detention and Alternatives to Residential Placement*) with state mandated services (*Secure and Non-Secure Detention Services*). **Let's not confuse mandated costly detention services with cost-effective prevention services. The combination of detention and prevention services proposed in this proposed block grant is detrimental to our young people.**

The long standing system of Youth Bureaus efficiently provides all young people the opportunity for after-school alternatives, substance abuse intervention, gang prevention, summer jobs, recreation, volunteerism, mentoring, life & leadership skill building and civic engagement, just to name a few. Without the Youth Bureau system in place, over 2 million young people throughout New York State will not have the same opportunities tomorrow as they do today to *prevent* risk behaviors and entrance into the juvenile justice and foster care system. *The prevention services provided by the Youth Bureau system are designed to prevent the need for more costly services. Prevention services* administered through positive youth development are vital to the health and safety New York's young people. Population based funding ensures equity with the assurance of programs based on local planning and local needs and providing youth development programs in every town and village across the state. This comprehensive approach to youth development is a national model and must be maintained.

Counties will be forced to choose between mandated detention services and youth prevention services, with less money than ever. **The recommended funding in this proposal is down 24.5%, from \$118 million to \$90million.** And, if a county block grant is implemented municipal youth bureaus could be potentially cut out of the picture – those who actually provide direct services to youth in cities, towns and villages which makes these services easily accessible to youth in need. Under the current structure which allows for flexibility and local decision making, Youth Bureaus work collaboratively with their municipalities to best determine the needs of all youth in their communities.

- Third, this proposal will cost the New York State more in the long term and is a direct contradiction to any Community Re-investment. The proposed block grant pits mandated (required costs) versus non-mandated youth development and prevention services which will force decisions onto the more costly service. One child in detention services for over 100 days could potentially “eat up” all funding, **thus eliminating youth development and prevention services which in the long term has a greater impact on keeping kids safe, healthy and out of harm's way and costs the State less money.** When local officials are forced to choose between providing expensive mandated detention services and effective prevention programs that have been proven to divert youth from courts and foster care, they will be forced to make short-term necessary decisions that have long term, costly negative consequences.

For example, to place a juvenile in MANDATED non-secure detention costs \$270-450/day. A 30 day stay at \$300/day can cost \$9,000 for one child for one month.

The same amount of funding can enable 9 youth who are not yet in trouble to get the mentoring they need to build the confidence and skills they need to succeed in school and avoid drugs and crime for one year. The average cost of a youth development program that prepares children and youth for graduation, jobs, and civic responsibilities is a few hundred dollars to 1,500/child/year. When you eliminate prevention and intervention services, the number of children and youth needing expensive crisis services, entering the court system and foster care will escalate, increasing the costs to \$50,000/child/year at the expense of local and state governments and all New Yorkers.

Also of concern, the proposal eliminates any State Aid matching requirements currently provided through Executive Law 420 19a. Youth Development funding has served as a core foundation for many community-based health and human services throughout New York State. As prescribed in Executive Law 420, 19a, it is the impetus to garner local funding (through match requirements) and used to leverage a tremendous amount of other public and private support well beyond the current allocation. And, the youth bureau system under the Executive Law has allowed for a base of support and the ability to be competitive in securing federal and private sector funding. Clearly, if this threshold of funding diminishes or fluctuates year to year (as it has the potential to do under this proposed Block Grant); it will have a negative impact on other health and human services well beyond the current allocation and, in fact, can be the cause for community-based services to close.

New York faces unprecedented fiscal times. No doubt, these times call for transformation. To be fiscally prudent, efforts should not be made to dismantle the Youth Bureau structure nor abdicate the State's commitment to youth development and prevention. Rather, the focus should be on how the state's current investments can coalesce toward a common goal for prevention services and development of all youth, albeit a more cost-effective one.

ANYSYB needs the Legislature's assistance and leadership in keeping this system intact, for all of New York's youth, including hundreds of thousands of high-risk youth. ANYSYB respectfully asks your consideration to assist over 2 million kids in maintaining a youth prevention and development system that:

- 1) Delays the January 1, 2009 block grant implementation date until prudent review of the current system and the needs of all youth, including high-risk youth, is examined;
- 2) Upholds Executive Law 420 Article 19a to maintain the current youth bureau system;
- 3) Focuses on Youth Prevention Funding and removes any State mandated services(Secure and Non-secure Detention Service) from any proposed funding stream;
- 4) Offers a prudent review process or taskforce to: examine the current youth development, prevention and intervention system and make recommendations for a system that cost-effectively serves the best interest and needs of the 2 million youth engaged; establishes statewide quality indicators; and formalize a statewide Youth Development Agenda that can be more formidably linked with other systems of care. In doing so, New York will be a national model with the impending advent of a Federal Office on Children and Youth Development;

- 5) Turns around the repeal of the SFY 2008-09 appropriations, albeit with a proportionate share of cuts that would have funded programs during the calendar year 2009;
- 6) Consolidates additional state youth development and prevention funding into a core Youth Prevention funding stream to be allocated through Youth Bureaus to enhance coordination of all resources in accordance with the County Comprehensive Plan. In doing so, it will enhance state and local leveraging capacity;
- 7) Assures that such funding streams reaches youth in all counties and cities, towns and villages in New York State;
- 8) Upholds the responsibility of the New York State Office of Children and Families Services (OCFS) for system accountability; approval of local plans; guiding cost/benefit methods and calculations; providing technical assistance, training and capacity building; developing statewide indicators and performance measurement outcomes and conducting resource development work to leverage the state's youth development investment;
- 9) Sets aside funding in the amount of \$200,000 for enhanced youth development, prevention and intervention training and capacity building to at the local and statewide level that focuses on: best practices, evidence –based models, program evaluation and monitoring, and positive youth development outcomes; and
- 10) Offers Community Reinvestment in youth development and prevention services to insure the health and safety for all youth.

On behalf of the 2 million youth being served by positive youth development, prevention and intervention services we thank you for this opportunity and offer our assistance and that of the Association of NYS Youth Bureaus on issues, data or questions of concern regarding New York's Youth Development System.

For Further Information Contact:

Jackie Negri, Executive Director
Association of NYS Youth Bureaus
1653 Central Avenue
Albany, NY 12205
Phone: 518-436-8712, cell: 518-526-8518
Fax: 518-427-8676
Email: jackie@nycap.rr.com
Website: www.anysyb.net

Frank Williams, Jr., Executive Director
City of White Plains Youth Bureau
11 Amherst Place
White Plains, NY 10601
Phone: 914-422-1378
Fax: 914-422-6489
Email: fwill@ci.white-plains.ny.us
Website: www.white-plains.ny.us