New York State Assembly
Carl E. Heastie, Speaker

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Committee on
Social Services
Andrew Hevesi, Chair

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

ANDREW HEVESI
Assemblyman 28th District
Queens County

CHAIRMAN
Social Services Committee

COMMITTEES
Energy
Health
Labor
Insurance

December 15, 2015

The Honorable Carl Heastie
Speaker of the Assembly
Room 932
Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York 12248

Dear Speaker Heastie;

On behalf of the Assembly Committee on Social Services, I respectfully submit to you the Committee's 2015 Annual Report. The Committee secured enactment of policies and continued investments in programs that will help low-income individuals and families achieve greater economic security, thereby providing enhanced opportunities for them to escape poverty.

The Committee continues to stand committed to advancing legislation that will improve the current welfare system in order to assist the transition of indigent New Yorkers from public assistance to economic independence. To demonstrate this commitment, the Committee secured more money for Career Pathways, Emergency Homeless Needs, Non-Residential Violence and Prevention Services.

Furthermore, the Committee advanced legislation that provides for an extension to the exemptions of certain income and resources when calculating public assistance benefits. In addition, the Committee reported legislation that would require local districts with a population of 5 million or more to simplify the conciliation procedures in cases when the recipient of public assistance programs fails to comply with employment program requirements. Finally, new legislation was enacted that requires the Commissioner of the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to submit a report detailing local social services districts efforts to prevent, identify, and address homelessness.

Along with my colleagues, and help from the Supportive Housing Network of New York and the Coalition for the Homeless, among other advisory organizations, the committee has focused on the effort to develop the New York/New York IV Program (NY/NY IV) to eradicate the worst homeless crisis in New York State since the 1930's. There are roughly 60,000 individuals,

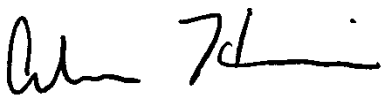
including 25,000 children, who are homeless in New York. Supportive Housing is the only viable solution for many who are homeless in New York State. Supportive Housing reduces the use of more expensive shelters, visits to detoxification centers, hospitalizations, emergency room use, and incarceration, and consequently saves taxpayers money. For these reasons, our goal has received bi-partisan support from 133 of my Assembly colleagues, as well as bi-partisan support in the New York State Senate, and a commitment from the Mayor of New York City to invest $2.6 Billion and create 15,000 units of supportive housing. We now have called upon the Governor to fund and create the remaining 35,000 supportive housing units in New York State, with a total of 30,000 units in New York City and 5,000 units upstate.

The New York State Assembly Social Services committee's agenda for 2016 will be comprised of legislation and budget actions focused on drastically reducing poverty and homelessness in New York State by improving the current public assistance system, creating pathways out of poverty and improving the way people are evaluated for public assistance. The committee is also spearheading the effort to create 35,000 supportive housing units and provide mental health and counseling services to those who are, or who are on the verge of homelessness, spanning all populations from children, to veterans, to domestic violence victims, and the elderly. In addition, the committee will present a package of legislation designed to help individuals and families reduce their reliance on State benefits as they drive toward self-sufficiency.

One of the key pieces of legislation the committee will propose is to develop a metric to appropriately collect and study how taxpayers' money is being spent for social services programs. It will be the first time in this committee's history that we comprehensively analyze the productivity of our new programs. This analysis will allow the Committee to focus on roadblocks for individuals who might otherwise have "slipped through the cracks" of the social services system. The goal of this new legislation is to fully assess how applying, receiving, and managing State funded benefits is accomplished, in order to appropriately encourage individuals and their families to work on becoming less dependent on individual programs and the system.
Overall, the Social Services committee has a wide net of policy initiatives which we plan to implement this upcoming session. These programs will greatly help some of New York State's most vulnerable people.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee members for all their hard work and dedication. Also, I would like to thank you for your support and leadership throughout the past session. We look forward to working with you in the 2016 legislative session in order to protect and improve vital services for the neediest people of our State.

Sincerely,



Andrew Hevesi, Chair
Committee on Social Services

2015 ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES

Andrew D. Hevesi
Chair

Committee Members

Majority	Minority
Jeffrion L. Aubry	Andrew Goodell (Ranker)
Charles Barron	Steven F. McLaughlin
Rodneyse Bichotte	Anthony H. Palumbo
Alec Brook-Krasny	Daniel Stec
Maritza Davila	Claudia Tenney
Latoya Joyner	
Ron Kim	
Shelley Mayer	
Roxanne J. Persaud	
Victor Pichardo	
Michaelle Solages	
Matthew Titone	

Committee Staff

Rebecca Rasmussen, Committee Clerk

Program and Counsel Staff

Rebecca Mudie, Assistant Secretary for Program and Policy
Jennifer Marrero, Analyst
Jennifer Sacco, Counsel
Anthony Lino, Committee Assistant
Terri Zaleski, Executive Secretary

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Assembly Social Services Committee has jurisdiction over legislation affecting programs providing financial and support services to indigent households in New York State. The work of the Committee also affects the aged, blind, and disabled residing in the community and in residential care facilities. The statutory basis for these programs is contained in the State Social Services Law.

The Committee works with the Committees on Health, Children and Families, Aging, Labor, Housing, and the Task Force on Homelessness. The Committee has legislative oversight responsibilities for programs administered by the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).

OTDA is responsible for supervising programs that provide assistance and support to eligible families and individuals in the state. Some of OTDA's functions include: providing temporary cash assistance; providing assistance in paying for food; providing heating assistance; overseeing New York State's child support enforcement program; determining certain aspects of eligibility for Social Security Disability benefits; supervising homeless housing and services programs; and providing assistance to certain immigrant populations.

The Legislature enacted the Social Services Law to authorize the administration of basic temporary assistance and emergency support programs statewide. The local Departments of Social Services (DSS), or Human Resource Administration (HRA) in New York City, implement the Social Service Law to provide temporary help to individuals and families with their economic and social services needs to assist them in reaching self-sufficiency. These programs include Family Assistance, Safety Net Assistance, Emergency Assistance to Needy Families with Children, Emergency Assistance for Adults, and certain parts of the Supplemental Security Income Program.

- Family Assistance (FA) - FA is a federally funded temporary assistance (TA) program for families. FA can only be provided to a family that includes a minor child living with a parent or caretaker relative, or to a pregnant woman. As a TANF-funded program, FA is subject to the state 60-month lifetime limit on assistance.
- Safety Net Assistance (SNA) - established by the Welfare Reform Act (WRA) of 1997 to provide assistance to individuals and families who are ineligible for Family Assistance (FA) or other federal temporary assistance programs. The SNA program is comprised of cash and a non-cash component.
- Emergency Assistance to Needy Families with Children (EAF) - is a federally funded program which provides assistance to deal with crisis situations threatening a family with a child under the age of 18, or under 19 and attending full - time secondary school or the equivalent level of vocational or technical training. EAF is designed to meet needs resulting from a sudden occurrence or a set of circumstances that was unforeseen and beyond the applicant's control that demand immediate attention.
- Emergency Assistance for Adults (EAA) - are grants to assist aged, blind or disabled individuals and couples who have been determined eligible for or are receiving Federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits or additional state payments and applied for such assistance to meet emergency needs that cannot be met by the regular monthly benefits of SSI and additional state payments.

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program- established by Congress in 1974 under Title XVI of the Social Security Act. The Social Security Administration (SSA) administers the program which provides a federal grant to individuals and couples who are aged, blind, or disabled.

Homeless Services

Local social services districts also have a responsibility to provide services and assistance to individuals in an effort to prevent homelessness, to meet the temporary housing and other immediate needs of eligible homeless persons, and to assist homeless persons in securing permanent housing. Individuals eligible for such assistance are those who are both homeless and eligible for TA.

Domestic Violence

The federal Wellstone-Murray Family Violence Option allows states to address the safety needs of domestic violence victims and their children within the state's TANF plan. The Family Violence Option includes procedures for screening for domestic violence, assessment, service referrals, and temporary waivers of TA requirements which would place the victim at further risk.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

New York administers the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which issues monthly benefits that can be used to purchase food at authorized retail food stores. Benefits are provided through an electronic benefit card, similar to a debit or credit card. Eligibility and benefit levels are based on household size, income, expenses and other factors.

Any person has the right to file an application for a type of temporary assistance or care with the local social services district at any time. Each applicant for services is required to meet all eligibility requirements in order to receive benefits. OTDA has created a website, Mybenefits.com, where individuals are able to learn about available benefits and the requirements to receive such benefits.

II. SIGNIFICANT LEGISLATION – 2015

A. INCOME MAINTENANCE

1. Work Activity Exemption
A.1805 (Titus)/S.5176 (Avella)

For Public Assistance (PA) recipients, federal law allows a maximum 12-month work exemption for a single-parent head of household with a child under the age of one without affecting the state's work participation rates. Currently, New York State allows a 3-month work exemption for recipients of temporary assistance that are single-parent head of households. This bill would require commissioners of local social services districts who are unable to provide a child care subsidy to all eligible working families to offer the 12-month work exemption to single-parent head of households receiving PA with a child under the age of one. The exemption would alleviate some of the financial pressure on counties that have had to cut subsidies to non-TANF households and allow the working families to obtain and continue employment.

This bill passed the Assembly.

2. Work Experience Program (WEP)
A.2050 (Quart)/S.1120 (Squadron)

A person who receives public assistance in New York State is required to repay the local social services district for the assistance he or she receives either in cash, asset acquisition or by working without pay in exchange for his or her benefits. The recovery of such assistance is expressly authorized against windfalls such as inheritances lawsuit proceeds, lottery winnings, and retroactive SSI awards. Additionally, local districts are entitled to recover public assistance by requiring applicants who are homeowners to provide the district with a mortgage lien equal to the sum of PA paid to them as a condition of eligibility for assistance. Many local social services districts require that PA recipients participate in WEP for no compensation to "work off their grant," then seek to recover assistance without crediting the recipient's time in WEP.

This bill would require local social services districts to credit the value of an individual's participation in WEP by calculating the number of hours worked times the higher of the state or federal minimum wage applicable at the time, when determining the amount of PA that the local social services district is entitled to recover.

This bill passed the Assembly.

3. Health Care Practitioners and Disability Determinations
A.3450 (Wright)/S.1840 (Dilan)

The federal government recognizes the importance of giving sufficient consideration to a physician's medical opinion, and follows this practice in SSI determination treating procedures, detailed in 20 CFR 416.927. Under New York State law, currently, there is little to no consideration given to the treating health care practitioner's opinion when an individual applying for PA has work limitations, disabilities or health issues that have been

identified by their treating health care practitioner. This bill would require physicians of local social service districts who examine PA applicants or recipients for possible work limitations and/or exemptions due to a potential disability, to consider the recipient's/applicant's treating health care practitioner's diagnosis when making a determination.

This bill passed the Assembly.

4. Clarification of the Conciliation Process
A.4250 (Wright)/S.3596 (Savino)

In an effort to assist public assistance recipients with staying focused on their work activities, A.4250 would require local social service districts with a population of one million or more, to streamline the conciliation processes by focusing on re-engaging the client. Under the current process, even when the recipient misses just one appointment, the local social services district is required to expend time and resources focused on sanctioning the client rather than re-ngaging the client in work activities as soon as possible. Not only would this bill enable the local social services districts to focus time and resources on the key goal of engagement, but this law also helps the recipients meet the necessary requirements to receive benefits.

Signed, Chapter 562 of 2015.

5. Standardization of Child Care Copayments
A.6174A (Russell)

Families receiving child care subsidies must contribute to the cost of child care, calculated as a percentage of the family's income above the Federal poverty level. This percentage varies from 10% in some counties to 35% in others, and creates a barrier to accessing child care for families that live in counties charging the higher end of the scale. To put this in perspective, in 2013, a family of three who earned $39,060 annually (200% of the Federal Poverty Level) could pay anywhere between $1,953 (10% copayment) to $6,835.50 (35% copayment) per year. Currently, there are at least 25 counties that employ the 35% multiplier when calculating a family's copayment. The cost-sharing requirement can be the deciding factor for whether a family will be able to afford child care, even when provided a subsidy. Such inequities create an unfair burden and prevent access to child care assistance for low-income families.

This bill would create equal access to child care assistance throughout the state by standardizing the amount of the family share. Local social services districts would charge a co-payment of no greater than 20% of the family’s income.

This bill passed the Assembly.

6. Resource Exemptions
A.7192 (Hevesi)/S.4830 (Carlucci)

This law ensures that families can retain essential assets while remaining eligible for PA by exempting the following assets for consideration in a family’s financial eligibility for PA: up to $2,000 ($3,000 if someone in the household is 60 or older), a primary residence,

and an automobile valued up to $4,650 (or up to $9,300 if it is needed to seek or retain employment). If the existing provision were not extended, the type and amount of exemptions would be left to regulatory action by the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance subject to the approval of the Division of the Budget. This bill extends these provisions for an additional two years.

Signed, Chapter 187 of 2015.

7. Suspension of Driving Privileges
A.7193A (Bichotte)/S. 5750 Gallivan

Local social services districts in conjunction with the Department of Motor Vehicles are authorized to suspend the driver's license of an individual that is delinquent in child support payments. This legislation extends this provision until June 30, 2017.

Signed, Chapter 29 of 2015.

B. OTHER LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

1. Report on Homeless Services throughout the State
A.3181A (Titus)/S.4343-A (Carlucci)

Homelessness in New York State has reached an all-time high. In New York City alone, more than 60,352 people, including over 25,000 children, sleep in a New York City shelter as of November 2014. In order to acquire a comprehensive view of efforts to battle homelessness in New York State, it is essential that there is an accounting of the programs and services available in each locality. This bill would require each local social services district to submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature on the programs and services for homeless persons living in the district and their funding sources.

Signed, Chapter 482 of 2015.

2. Therapy Dogs
A.6626 (Rosenthal)/S.5372 (Carlucci)

Victims of domestic violence who own service or therapy dogs are often reluctant to leave their abusers for the safety of a shelter without taking their animals with them. This reluctance is often due to the need to have their trusted companion with them as well as the fear that their abuser might also harm the animal. Without a guarantee that the animal can accompany them, victims will remain in abusive situations indefinitely. Only two State programs have specific policies permitting these animals to accompany their owners, and it is crucial that all shelters have the same policy.

In situations where a dog serves the dual purpose of being a service or therapy dog, as well as providing companionship to its owner, it is particularly important that residential domestic violence programs permit residents to bring their animal with them. This bill would allow victims of domestic violence to be accompanied by service animals or therapy dogs within residential programs.

Signed, Chapter 584 of 2015.

3. Expands Domestic Violence Crimes
A.7871 (Weinstein)

We know that in addition to physical and psychological tactics, abusers employ economic means to control and otherwise abuse their victim making it harder for victims to secure their safety. Recognizing economic abuse as a form of domestic abuse, in 2013 via Chapter 526, New York enacted changes to the family offense laws of New York State to add certain forms of economic abuse to the definition of a family offense. At the time, the Social Services Law was inadvertently not amended. This bill would address this issue by expanding the definition of "victims of domestic violence" to include identify theft, grand larceny and coercion.

This bill passed the Assembly.

III. SFY 2015-16 STATE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

A. Overview of the TANF Block Grant

The nation's welfare system was dramatically reformed with the enactment of the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). The federal law adopted a "work first" approach, eliminated the entitlement to cash assistance, and imposed time limits, work requirements and sanctions on recipients. The cornerstone of the law was the creation of the TANF block grant, which provides states funds for their cash assistance and welfare-to-work programs.

New York received $2.443 billion for the Family Assistance program through the federal TANF block grant. The 2015-16 state budget included approximately $1.5 billion to support benefit payments to low-income New Yorkers.

B. TANF Programs

New York's TANF program has developed into the state's most critical system of support and assistance for children and families who struggle to make ends meet. In New York, programs including wage supplements, tax credits, job training and skill development, case management and counseling, child care and transportation were developed to assist families in need during the transition from poverty to self-sufficiency through work. For several years, New York has been authorized to utilize TANF funds not only for families eligible for federal assistance through the FA program, but also for families whose income does not exceed 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

The 2015-16 budget included a Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS) to provide local districts with a block grant. In order for a program to receive funding out of the TANF surplus, it must meet one of the four TANF purposes:

1. Provide assistance to needy families;
2. End the dependence of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage;
3. Prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
4. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Below is a breakdown of State spending of the TANF dollars for the SFY 2015-16:

CHILD CARE INVESTMENTS

The child care subsidy program provided by local social services districts enables an income-eligible parent or caretaker to work or engage in other approved activities by helping parent(s)/caretaker(s) to pay some or all of the cost of child care services. A $310 million block grant was included in the budget to provide subsidies to parents.

EMPLOYMENT AND TRANSITIONAL INITIATIVES

Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority (RGRTA): This program provides a monthly bus pass to allow eligible individuals from seven member counties to travel to and from work, or to participate in work related activities. In Wayne County, funds are used to support the transportation costs of individuals who use the WATS Demand Response Bus Services or TANF

work participation activities. Funds are also used to extend the WATS service hours to accommodate employees at Kraft. RGRTA was awarded $250,000 in the budget.

Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP): The purpose of the TANF SYEP is to provide eligible youth with a quality employment and educational experience during the summer months. For many youth, this is their first introduction to the world of work. Valuable lessons which center on employment, including work ethic, appropriate workplace behavior, interaction with co-workers and supervisors, receiving a paycheck and money management are learned. $30 million was restored to fund the employment program.

Domestic Violence Screening: Domestic Violence Screening involves identifying persons who are currently victims of domestic violence and offering temporary waivers from the public assistance (PA) program requirements where compliance with such requirements would place the victim and/or victim's children at greater risk of harm or make it more difficult for them to escape from abuse. $3 million was budgeted to provide these services.

Wage Subsidy Program: Employers are reimbursed for wages and related benefits that the employer paid to the participant during the subsidy period. Using wage subsidies as a hiring incentive, non-profit agencies work with employers to develop positions for individuals who have been unable to find employment through conventional means. This program was allocated $950,000 to provide subsidies.

LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

Bridge Program: The Bridge Program which was allocated $102,000, operates in conjunction with the State University of New York's University Center for Academic and Workforce Development, and provides local social services districts with employment preparation services specifically designed to provide Family Assistance (FA) and other TANF-eligible families with the skills and supports necessary to obtain employment.

Homeless and Supportive Housing Programs: These programs provide a continuum of services for homeless, at risk and low-income households. BHSS programs are designed to prevent homelessness, provide shelter for the homeless, construct supportive housing for the homeless and offer essential services to stabilize housing situations and increase levels of self-sufficiency. $2.5 million was allocated for Homeless and Supportive Housing Programs.

ACCESS – Welfare to Careers: Metropolitan College's Welfare-to-Careers Consortium Program is collaboration among three major higher educational institutions in New York City (Metropolitan College, Medgar Evers College and Pace University). The Consortium affords participants the opportunity to earn their two-year degree or a baccalaureate degree, thereby greatly increasing their chances of gaining permanent, full-time employment at a sustainable salary level. $800,000 was allocated for the ACCESS program.

Emergency Homeless Program: The Emergency Homeless Program provides assistance to organizations in local social services districts with a population in excess of two million. This program received $1,000,000 to help meet the emergency needs of homeless individuals, families and those at risk of becoming homeless who are eligible for TANF benefits and whose incomes do not exceed 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Disability Advocacy Program: This program provides for the legal representation of individuals whose federal disability benefits have been denied or may be discontinued and received $3.63 million in this year's budget.

FLEXIBLE FUND FOR FAMILY SERVICES (FFFS)

The FFFS encompasses a number of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs administered by local departments of social services which are funded with the Federal TANF Services Block Grant. The SFY 2015-16 allocations for FFFS is $964 million.

APPENDIX A

2015 SUMMARY SHEET

SUMMARY OF ACTION ON ALL BILLS
REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE ON

SOCIAL SERVICES

FINAL ACTION	ASSEMBLY BILLS	SENATE BILLS	TOTAL BILLS
BILLS REPORTED WITH OR WITHOUT AMENDMENT			
TO FLOOR; NOT RETURNING TO COMMITTEE (FAVORABLE)	2	0	2
TO WAYS AND MEANS	7	0	7
TO CODES	2	0	2
TO RULES	3	0	3
TO JUDICIARY	0	0	0
TOTAL	14	0	14
BILLS HAVING COMMITTEE REFERENCE CHANGED			
TO ways and means_____	1	0	1
TO _____	0	0	0
TO _____	0	0	0
TO _____	0	0	0
TOTAL	1	0	1
SENATE BILLS SUBSTITUTED OR RECALLED			
SUBSTITUTED		2	2
RECALLED		0	0
TOTAL		2	2
BILLS DEFEATED IN COMMITTEE	0	0	0
BILLS HELD FOR CONSIDERATION WITH A ROLL- CALL VOTE	0	0	0
BILLS NEVER REPORTED, HELD IN COMMITTEE	66	9	75
BILLS HAVING ENACTING CLAUSES STRICKEN	0	0	0
MOTIONS TO DISCHARGE LOST	0	0	0
TOTAL BILLS IN COMMITTEE	81	11	92
TOTAL NUMBER OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD	3		

APPENDIX B

LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS/ROUNDTABLES

A. Revisiting Public Assistance Reform

May 21, 2015
Albany, New York

The history of public assistance has been one of continuing change and growth since its formal creation in the 1930's. In 1996, the nation's welfare system was dramatically reformed with the enactment of the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). The federal law adopted a "work first" approach, eliminated the entitlement to cash assistance, imposed time limits and work requirements on recipients and gave states the ability sanction recipients for non-compliance. This year, the standing committee on social services sought to facilitate a roundtable to gather information on the barriers the current system has that impede individuals' ability to receive assistance and what hurdles have we as a State created for individuals trying to leave the public assistance rolls and achieve self-sufficiency.

Among the participants at the roundtable were representatives from Empire Justice Center, Legal Aid Society, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, Legal Services of New York, Human Services and Poverty Reduction FPWA, and the Coalition for the Homeless. Advocates first addressed PA and its goal, which according to advocates is to enable people to meet their most basic need and bring them to some level of stability within their lives. In regards to PA, advocates brought to light the barriers recipients face regarding work. Advocates suggested that there should be less focus on sanctions when an individual misses a day of work, but rather find ways to reengage individuals in their mandatory work activity.

Reducing the length and making a more comprehensive application process would also really help recipients make sound choices on what type of assistance best suits their needs. Removing barriers to actually receiving assistance was a major focus of the roundtable. Many suggestions were provided to address this issue. For example, removing or increasing the amount of assets an individual can have and still be eligible to receive assistance.

Lastly, housing for the homeless population was also an important subject matter during the roundtable discussion. In order for the state to improve on addressing the needs of the homeless population, advocates suggested; that there needs to be more permanent housing options for those who need it most.

B. Child Poverty Hearing/Roundtable

August 25, 2015 and September 23, 2015 –Hearings were held in Binghamton and New York City
August 24, 2015 – Roundtable was held in Rochester

Currently, New York State has some of the highest levels of child poverty in the country. According to U.S. Census data from 2013, 22% of children under the age of eighteen are living below the federal poverty level (the U.S. Census defines the family poverty level for

a family of four as $24,250 annually). Poverty is far reaching and has lasting effects on our children; according the American Psychological Association, children living in poverty have an increased likelihood of teen pregnancy, dropping out of high school, ending up in the foster care system or becoming part of the juvenile justice system.

Given the prevalence of child poverty and the severity of its effects, the Assembly Committee on Children and Families and the Assembly Committee on Social Services sought to explore the reasons for and solutions to, poverty around the State. According to U.S. Census data, 30% of children in New York City, 47% of children in the City of Binghamton and 50% of children living in the City of Rochester live in poverty, far exceeding the state average. Therefore, these locations were chosen to hold public forums where stakeholders could speak to the impacts of child poverty. Hearings were held on August 25th in Binghamton and September 23rd in NYC, and a roundtable was conducted on August 24th in Rochester.

Stakeholders testifying at the hearings and participating in the roundtable identified major issues impeding families from escaping poverty and achieving self-sufficiency. Among them, child hunger was a common theme. Advocates suggested increasing funding for free and reduced lunch programs in impoverished communities. Others spoke of the importance of raising the minimum wage, supporting pay equity and increasing access to affordable housing. Such actions would reduce barriers to employment and an eventual reliance on public assistance programs.

Child care was an area of particular focus as well. In order to maintain employment, it was identified as essential that families living in poverty have child care assistance necessary to access safe and quality day care. Stakeholders spoke of the need to increase the number of slots so that more eligible families are served. A common issue facing low-income families is that as wages increase, and self-sufficiency becomes more attainable, day care assistance eligibility is lost. Families therefore face an increase in day care costs that greatly exceeds their increase in pay. Legislation was suggested to help these families so that mobility in the workforce does not result in child care costs that keep them in poverty, thus creating a disincentive to seek higher wages.

C. Revisiting Public Assistance Reform and how it relates to the Rochester – Monroe Anti-Poverty Taskforce

August 24, 2015
Rochester, New York

In 2014 a new holistic and integrated approach to poverty was being created to address Rochester's escalating poverty rates. The Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative was designed to address the needs of the community as a whole, rather than the current fragmented system. With the current system not meeting the needs of the community due to the growing economic decline, coming up with a new approach to address poverty became a priority.

A very interesting aspect of the work being done by the Anti-Poverty Task Initiative is moving away from the traditional fragmented and disjointed approach to serving people in poverty with a more unified approach. The Committee would like to gather information about the work that is being done by the many different work groups that are part of the

Anti-Poverty Task Force as well as the steps that will be taken to integrate services throughout the community. This approach could be helpful to serve all of the New Yorkers in need of services.

D. Community Services Block Grant

September16, 2014
Albany, New York

The Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) is a federally funded program administered by the Division of Community Services within the Department of State (DOS). There are 52 CSBG grantees in the New York State network who serve all 62 counties with services catered to the particular needs of each community. The CSBG awards Community Action Agencies (CAA), Community Action Programs, migrant and seasonal farm worker organizations, as well as Native tribes or Tribal organizations the necessary funds to provide advocacy, outreach, programs and services to the indigent populations living in communities throughout New York State. These funds in turn are intended to combat poverty, revitalize low-income neighborhoods, while encouraging families as well as individuals in rural and urban areas to become self-sufficient and financially stable.

This year the Assembly Standing Committee on Social Services hosted their biennial community Service Block Grant hearing where witnesses provided testimonies on the access to CSBG funds as well as how they were utilized by community action agencies. Witnesses who participated at the hearing included the Chief Executive Officer of the New York State Community Action Association, Assistant Commissioner of the New York City Department of Youth & Community Development, Resource Specialist representing the Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency Inc., and the President of the Commission on Economic Opportunity.

Witnesses provided testimony that the CSBG was a vital source of funding for special programs geared toward aiding individuals and families in need. The CSBG funds allowed for the continuance of special programs ranging from financial literacy initiatives, immigrant services, fatherhood initiatives, trade certifications, community development initiatives as well as summer youth employment. The primary concerns of community action agencies in relation to the CSBG funds were agencies needing sufficient notice and turn - around time for the preparation and submission of information, reports, contracts and things such as comments on the CSBG management plan, in order to produce high quality work in a comprehensive manner. Funding for CAA services is limited and has become increasingly difficult to access for social services and community based programs. CAA's ask that DOS keep discretionary funds within the Community Action Network to respond to the limited source of funds. CAAs' have advocated for the creation of a Commission on Poverty and Economic Security, having such a commission would enhance the focus on the efforts to address poverty, employment support and public benefits.

E. Child Care Workgroup

The New York State Assembly Child Care Workgroup, formed on May 6, 2013, is tasked with examining and exploring innovative ideas for enhancing child day care so that the

needs of families and providers are met. The Workgroup is comprised of the following Committee, Task Force and Subcommittee Chairs to guide its work: Assembly Member Cathy Nolan, Chair of the Committee on Education; Assembly Member Michele Titus, Chair of the Committee on Labor; Assembly Member Aileen Gunther, Chair of the Committee on Mental Health; Assembly Member Donna Lupardo, Chair of the Committee on Children and Families; Assembly Member Andrew Hevesi, Chair of the Committee on Social Services; Ellen Jaffee, Chair of the Committee on Oversight, Analysis and Investigation; Aravella Simotas, Chair of the Task Force on Women's Issues; Addie Russell, Chair of the Subcommittee on Women Veterans; and Latrice Walker, Chair of the Subcommittee on Renewable Energy. This year, the workgroup reconvened to hold three roundtables addressing major issues facing the State's child care system. These are: the interplay between day care and pre-kindergarten, the market rate and the upcoming reauthorization of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant.

E1. Interplay between Child Day Care and Pre-Kindergarten programs; October 6th

Expansion of universal pre-kindergarten has been long-standing priority for the Assembly. However, according to education and child care advocates, as well as parents, many children are still unable to access pre-kindergarten programs. While pre-kindergarten is an early education program, it encompasses a population of children who traditionally been served by child care providers. In some cases, the child care provider or community based organization is the pre-kindergarten provider, in other instances, the school districts provide pre-kindergarten.

The New York State Assembly's Workgroup on Child Care held a roundtable on October 6, 2015 to examine the interplay between pre-kindergarten and child care. As pre-kindergarten programs continue to expand across the state it is important to explore the impact pre-kindergarten has had on the child care industry and families who use various day care models offered.

Advocates provided substantive background on the issue of accessing quality child daycare and pre-kindergarten. Pre-kindergarten programs maintain varying hours, many of which are half day. This means that families are left to find arrangements for the remainder of the day. Many families do not have the flexibility to take time off to transport their children multiple times during the work day. Transportation plays a major role in this issue and advocates suggested that the State provide funding to transport children between pre-kindergarten and other childcare facilities accordingly.

In addition to the issue of transportation, advocates spoke to the need of developing a uniform curriculum for all teachers in pre-kindergarten which would include professional development, training and any relevant certification. This would allow teachers to provide improved quality care and help children learn appropriate developmental skills. Advocates also emphasized the desire to have the State also develop an "Office of Early Learning" that would work as a central system between the Department of Education and the Office of Children and Family Services to streamline the regulatory process.

Currently, teachers in pre-kindergarten have disparities in wages. For example, teachers of four year olds earn more income than three year olds, and teachers at the Department of Education make more than community based organizations. This disparity produces major retention issues as well as consistency issues for children. Advocates expressed that the

State should establish a uniform pre-kindergarten funding stream to remedy these disparities and discourage the competitive Request for Proposal process.

E2. Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant; October 19th

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is a federal block grant that was created in 1990 to help low income families by providing them with subsidies to afford child care and to encourage healthy child development in appropriate environments. In November 2014, President Obama reauthorized the CCDBG, making significant policy changes to the program. Several policy changes were adopted with the reauthorization, including amendments to health and safety requirements for child care providers, establishing more family-friendly guidelines for eligibility policies, and fostering trust with parents by ensuring they have access to information regarding their options for available child care providers.

The Workgroup held a roundtable on October 19 to examine how the federal reauthorization of the child care and development block grant will impact families and different providers in areas such as; health and safety requirements for child care providers, eligibility and access, child care quality improvement, and the availability of consumer and provider information. Advocates who participated in the roundtable were able to provide perspective regarding the impact CCDBG would have on the child care industry.

One of the major concerns raised at the roundtable was the additional cost to the State. The Division of Budget estimates that administration alone will cost $90 million. The total impact to the Child Care Block Grant, and the cost to maintain the number of families served, is unknown. Advocates raised concerns such as small counties being burdened with additional cost to provide background checks for childcare workers. The federal law will require that all counties determine eligibility every 12 months rather than 6. Advocates mentioned that currently only half the counties currently comply with this, and it may be difficult to determine eligibility for parents who lose their employment or have an increase in income during the 12 month period. To alleviate this potential issue, advocates suggested that a phase out period of benefits be established for parents whose income increases as opposed to an immediate cut off from assistance. Until regulations are issued by the Office of Children and Family Services, the true impact to providers and families is unknown.

E3. Market Rate; October 27th

The Office of Children and Families Services (OCFS) conducts a market rate survey bi-annually to determine the child day care reimbursement rate. The market rate is used as a ceiling for federal and state reimbursement for payments for child care services. The Work group held a roundtable on October 27 to discuss with advocates and OCFS how the market rate survey is conducted and how the reimbursement rate is established; if the current methodology to establish the market rate is appropriate and whether there are different approaches the state should consider.

Advocates at the roundtable expressed the need to make adjustments to the rate methodology as the methodology used does not adequately capture the true cost of care. The rate reflects what providers are charging rather than what is actually required to support an adequate level of staff, comply with regulations and increase the quality of child

care. The level at which the rate is set by OCFS is also problematic. Currently providers are reimbursed at 69% rather than the 75% that the federal law suggests is appropriate to ensure equal access to child care for low-income families. This impacts parental choice as well as the ability of the child care provider to stay in business. Concerns were expressed that quality of care would suffer and the robustness of the child care industry would falter as a result of the inadequacy of the rate.

F. Foster Care Rates Hearing

September 24, 2015
New York City

Each year the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) establishes rates known as Maximum State Aid Rates (MSAR), which set the maximum amount of reimbursement local social services districts will receive from the state for foster care programs and services. However, MSAR rates are not mandatory, which allows the local social services districts to set their own rates for foster care programs, creating the opportunity for disparity across the state.

Foster care programs are vital to New York; serving approximately 20,000 youth per year according to OCFS. These programs provide valuable services to foster youth and their families, helping to prepare them for adulthood and equipping them with the tools they need to escape poverty. According to a nationwide survey known as "Hitting the M.A.R.C." conducted by Children's Right, New York's reimbursement rates are inadequate to meet our federal obligation to provide basic care for our youth. Several advocacy groups have also raised concerns regarding the adequacy of funding, and their ability to continue to provide appropriate services.

The Committee on Children and Families, the Committee on Social Services and the Subcommittee on Foster Care held a roundtable to better understand how the MSAR has impacted foster care programs, as well as foster youth and their families. Participants at the roundtable emphasized the need for a higher rate to support providers in meeting the needs of foster youth. An adequate rate would help improve services for foster youth, including mental health and behavioral services. There is also a need to better prepare youth who are aging out of foster care, rather than returning home or being placed with a relative or suitable person, so that they can be self-sufficient.

G. Fiscal Impact of the 2014-15 Enacted State Budget on Veteran Services and Benefits

November 17, 2015
Albany, New York

The New York State Assembly Standing Committees on Veterans' Affairs, Social Services and the Subcommittee on Women Veterans held a public hearing in Albany, New York to review the current State veterans' benefits that were funded in the SFY 2015-16 budget and the ways veterans and families members are informed of the benefits that they earned. The Division of Veterans' Affairs and several organizations that have programs dedicated to veterans gave testimony before the committee.

H. Examining the Prevalence of Poverty among our Senior Citizens
November 18, 2015
Albany, New York

The Assembly Standing Committee on Aging, in conjunction with the Assembly Standing Committee on Social Services, the Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force, the Assembly Subcommittee on Community Integration, and the Assembly Subcommittee on Outreach and Oversight of Senior Citizen Programs, held a hearing to better understand the causes, risk factors, and impact of poverty among senior citizens in New York State.

The goal of the hearing was to understand the causes and risk factors of poverty among senior citizens, especially those who are disproportionately impacted by poverty, in order to improve prevention efforts and find solutions to help those seniors currently trapped in poverty across the State. The Committee also sought to understand the impact of the assistance currently provided by state and local government agencies, as well as any gaps in such services, that may require review or that may lead to the creation of new initiatives that can reverse this trend.

The Committees heard from several organizations who talked about senior housing, hunger assistance, access to services, and low retirement income. Poverty is a complex problem with no easy answers. The Committee will continue to look into this issue and work with other stakeholders toward a solution.

I. Three-Quarter Housing Roundtable in New York
December 14, 2015
New York City

On December 14th, the standing committees on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse and Social Services convened a roundtable to better understand the conditions individuals face in three-quarter housing, how the lack of insufficient shelter allowances were negatively affecting some of New York's most vulnerable populations, and what steps the legislature could take to help individuals recovering from substance abuse secure more stable and supportive housing. Participants at the roundtable emphasized the difficulties these individuals face and the deplorable conditions most of them experience living in three-quarter housing. They highlighted the fact that many landlords were taking advantage of these vulnerable populations utilizing scare tactics and the threat of (illegal) eviction to keep these individuals compliant. Participants expressed possible solutions to the issue, such as the need for a higher shelter allowance, which would give these individuals more options when returning to their community from places like substance abuse providers or incarceration. They also complimented the efforts being taken by NYC's task force by tracking down homes with a high utilization rate of shelter allowances.

APPENDIX C

FINAL ACTION ON BILLS REPORTED BY THE SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

ASSEMBLY BILL # SPONSOR	SENATE BILL # SPONSOR	FINAL ACTION	DESCRIPTION
A.1489 Wright	N/A	Referred to Ways and Means	Would eliminate the finger imaging requirement for applicants or recipients of SNAP who are not also applicants for or recipients of Family Assistance or Safety Net Assistance.
A.1805 Titus	S.5176 Avella	Passed Assembly	Would modify the work requirements for single parent head of households receiving public assistance (PA) with a child under the age of 1.
A.1861B Mayer	S.3449A Stewart-Cousins	Passed Assembly	Would require that when a local social services district amends their consolidated services plan (to either increase copayments, or lower eligibility for child care subsidies) they must first submit it to the local advisory board for approval.
A.2050 Quart	S.1120 Squadron	Referred to Rules	Would require local districts to credit the value of an individual's time in the Work Experience Program (WEP) against any benefits legally recovered by the district.
A.3181A Titus	S.4343A Carlucci	Chaptered 482	Would require a detailed report by local social services districts identifying funding sources to reflect the efforts of each district to identify, prevent, and address homelessness.
A.3450 Wright	S.1840 Dilan	Passed Assembly	Would require that in instances where a certified DSS practitioner is evaluating an applicant, the opinion of the applicant's treating physician be considered in the determination, and that any denial must include a written explanation that presents evidence to support the certified practitioner's differing opinion.
A.4250 Wright	S.3596 Savino	Chaptered 562	Would require local social services districts, with a population of 5 million or more, prior to imposing a sanction on a PA recipient for failure to comply with work rules, to confirm that the recipient is not exempt from the work requirement, and that the recipient had appropriate child care, transportation, and disability accommodations. This bill allows sanctions to be removed when recipients remedy the cause for the disengagement.
A.5936A Wright	S.3597 Savino	Referred to Ways and Means	Would prohibit the work experience programs in New York State.

ASSEMBLY BILL # SPONSOR	SENATE BILL # SPONSOR	FINAL ACTION	DESCRIPTION
A.6174A Russell		Passed Assembly	Would standardize the child care co-payments across the state to be no greater than 20% of a families earned income.
A.6626 Rosenthal	S.5372 Carlucci	Chaptered 584	Would require service animals or therapy dogs to accompany victims of domestic violence at residential programs. Service animals are already required to be permitted under the ADA, as long as any needed accommodation would not impose an undue financial or administrative burden.
A.7192 Hevesi	S.4830 Carlucci	Chapter 187	Provides for the extension of current exemptions of income and resources to qualify for public assistance programs.
A.7193A Bichotte	S.5750 Gallivan	Chapter 29	Provides for an extension authorizing local social services districts in conjunction with the Department of Motor Vehicles to suspend the driver's license of an individual that is delinquent in child support payments.
A.7393A Brindisi	S.5151 Little	Passed Assembly	Would increase the state share of supplemental security benefits and the personal needs allowances for low-income individuals residing in adult care facilities.
A.7871 Weinstein		Passed Assembly	Would make the corresponding changes that were made to the Family Court Act regarding the expansion of certain crimes against victim of domestic violence to include identity theft, grand larceny and coercion