

Westchester County  
Department of Social Services

2009

Budget Presentation

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Kevin P. Mahon  
Commissioner

## **Westchester County Department of Social Services 2009 Proposed Budget**

### **Mission**

The mission of the Westchester County Department of Social Services is to empower its customers to become independent and to ensure the health, safety and protection of vulnerable adults and children.

The Department has taken a careful and prudent approach to developing its 2009 request, and is continuing to maximize efficiencies and effectively manage controllable costs, while maintaining essential services for children, adults, and families in our community by fully utilizing available State and Federal funding and partnering with other County Departments and private providers. Through these programs, the Department is better able to fulfill our mission and empower customers to become independent and to ensure their health, safety, and protection.

### **Innovation and Efficiency**

A number of Department innovations and efficiencies have improved services provided through the County, while also saving money. Examples include: 1) a 15% reduction (215) in total staff since 1998, while continuing necessary programs; 2) a decrease of 7,857 Temporary Assistance cases since February, 1998 (a 57% decline); 3) a 43% reduction in the shelter population since 1998, resulting in the closure of two sites; and, 4) the use of Information Technology strategies and systems to more effectively manage caseloads and services (e.g., an electronic Medicaid decision support system to help open cases faster; case scanning systems; direct data entry; a case note dictation system; use of wireless laptops; case management, day care and housing management systems; a system to allow us to get direct access to Social Security and SSI benefit information; and a medical transportation signature/fraud prevention program piloted in 2008).

### **2008 Accomplishments**

The Department's 2009 proposed budget represents an opportunity to sustain accomplishments in Child Welfare, Day Care, Temporary Assistance, Housing, Medical Assistance, Employment Services, Long Term Care, and other valuable initiatives. Examples of important accomplishments in 2008 include:

#### Child Welfare

- The online Child Welfare Policy Manual is complete and fully operational. This comprehensive resource provides casework staff with information on federal, state, and local policies; regulations; local procedures; nationally recognized best practice standards; PDF forms; and community and Department resources, providing consistency for staff across all programs and district offices.
- Children's Village provides Crisis Respite to adolescents at high risk of foster care. This includes PINS (Persons In Need of Supervision) as well as CPS-managed older adolescents. They are provided with shelter, case management, and educational supports. Of the 172 youth served through the third quarter of 2008, 94% have avoided the need for foster care placement.

- The Child Fatality Review Team (CFRT) is a collaboration of representatives from the following disciplines: Child Protective Services (CPS), New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the County Attorney's Office, the District Attorney's Office, the Medical Examiner's Office, Local and state law enforcement, Emergency Medical Services, a forensic pediatrician, and the Department of Health and Victim's Assistance Services who collaborate to write independent reports that highlight the strengths and challenges in CPS fatality investigations. This tool is used as feedback to strengthen areas that need improvement and reinforce areas that are already strong. The CFRT reviews have surfaced the need for public education campaigns such as: Babies Sleep Safest Alone Campaign, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) prevention tips, 911 cell phone call education, baby walker safety, and nursing pillow safety. These education campaigns are all measures to increase the safety, health, and well being of Westchester residents.
- The New York State Office of Children and Family Services conducted an Ongoing Monitoring Assessment (OMA) review of Westchester CPS. The state commented on the following factors as local strengths in the review: All safety assessments and determinations were completed on time. The safety of children was immediately addressed in all cases. Our 24 hour local mandate to respond to reports was effective, as was the detailed information regarding safety of our children. Our interviews with children were conducted in accordance with best practices.
- The Training Academy moved into its permanent site in January, 2008. The training and conference rooms are utilized by other County departments as well. The Child Welfare Training Division has a mission to train and assess new child welfare casework staff. Having this specific front end training and assessment allows the Department to move qualified staff to the offices, which manifests itself in stronger work performance.
- The Office of Staff Development in conjunction with the DSS systems office is piloting new technology that will allow Child Welfare Workers to use a portable computer tablet in the field which will allow them to have access to computer systems they have at their desk. This will give workers the capability of maximizing time with families and be able to better provide quality services.

#### Adult Protective Services (APS)

- In April 2008, the results of a program audit conducted by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services were received. APS received a compliance score of 99.42%.
- APS increased community outreach by participating in the Department of Senior Programs & Services Elder Abuse Coalition, serving as a co-chair, and presenting the Senior Crime Busters initiative throughout the County's senior centers, places of worship, and professional organizations. APS also participates in ongoing training provided at the Westchester Police Academy in Valhalla.

### Child Day Care

- The Child Care Council of Westchester, under contract with DSS, continued to administer the Westchester County Child Care Scholarship Program for families who exceeded income requirements for the subsidy program, making the following awards: Round 1 (7/1/08- 6/30/09) - 82 households, 114 children, \$3,414 average award per household; and Round 2 (10/1/08- 9/30/09) - 114 households, 140 children, \$3,777 average award per household.
- In order to improve the child day care application process, DSS has taken the following steps after discussions with child care directors:
  - 1) A waiver to eliminate the necessity of pursuing child support was granted by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services and implemented in 2008.
  - 2) A simplified application has been drafted and is currently awaiting approval from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.
- The Child Care Council continued, with the help of DSS funding, to implement suggestions made by the ETC Institute. As a result, there is now a liaison with the Child Care Council who assists providers and customers with questions and problems relating to the child care subsidy system.

### Child Support Enforcement

- The Child Support Enforcement program helps strengthen families and reduces welfare spending by placing responsibility for support of children on those parents with the financial resources to provide this support. Through October, 2008, this office collected \$56 million and is working to meet its record goal of \$66.5 million in 2008. In 2007, this office collected more than \$64.6 million, representing a 103% increase from the \$31.8 million collected in 1998. New York State has recognized this program for six consecutive years (2002-2007) for best overall performance among the large counties.

### Temporary Assistance

- Although the Department has seen a 5% increase in the total Temporary Assistance caseload in the first ten months of 2008 (from 5,746 to 6,041), caseloads have declined dramatically in the last ten years from 13,898 in February 1998, to 6,041 in October 2008, a decrease of 7,857 cases or 57%. These decreases are the result of an innovative work first approach including employment, case management, diversion, and post-employment retention services. Since January 2008, we have assisted TANF customers in obtaining 803 jobs, 201 obtained certificates in vocational training programs, 62 made significant educational gains or earned their GED, 15 earned a certificate in a program to prepare them for college, and 64 were assisted in obtaining SSI/SSD benefits. Finally, Westchester's Employment Participation Rate has been ranked among the highest of the largest districts in New York State.

### Housing

- The Department maintains its commitment to safe housing. In September, 2008, there were 764 families and singles living in temporary housing. This represents a 43% reduction in the shelter population compared to January, 1998, when 1,333 families and singles were living in temporary shelters. This success is due in large part to

employment and rental assistance programs. As a result, the Department has closed two shelter sites, yet maintains necessary capacity for this population.

### Employment

- In program year 2008, the Westchester-Putnam Local Workforce Investment Board was once again recognized by the New York State Department of Labor for meeting or exceeding its performance standards, resulting in an incentive grant of \$325,897.

### Long Term Care

- Due to advances in technology, medicine, and life expectancy, the Department continues to meet the growing need for Home Health Care Services. Home Care Services reduce the need for expensive nursing home placements, are consistent with our mission, and comply with the Supreme Court's Olmstead Decision which affords people the right to live in the least restrictive environment. As an example, the Department took part in two Requests for Proposals (RFPs) at the recommendation of the New York State Berger Commission Report on Health Care Facilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The first RFP resulted in contingent approval of 160 additional Assisted Living Program (ALP) beds in Westchester County. Results of the second RFP are pending, but are expected to yield similar results. ALP is a cost effective program for customers who require housing, supervision, light housekeeping and meals at a significantly reduced cost than nursing home placement.

## **2009 Budget Highlights**

The Department's 2009 Budget Request provides for a tax levy increase of \$1.37 million. This increase has been mitigated by prudent strategies to control costs and maximize efficiencies. Faced with the demands of mandated services, particularly a more than \$2.4 million increase in the local share of Medicaid and projected increases in the Temporary Assistance caseload as described in more detail below, extraordinary efforts were made to offset the net local tax levy increase by significantly reducing other operating and discretionary expenses, as well as a new foster care case management initiative designed to work with children in the most appropriate and cost-effective levels of care, resulting in a decrease in total proposed expenses of nearly \$8.2 million or 1.4%. This proposal includes 1,258 total staff in 2009, including trust positions, a net reduction of 22 positions, including 21 operating lines, from 2008. This reflects a total staff reduction of 215 positions, or 15%, between 1998 and 2009.

These expense reductions, however, are offset by even greater decreases in revenue, particularly as a result of two rounds of New York State cuts in important programs such as child day care, foster care, preventive/protective, adult protective, detention, domestic violence, independent living, adoption, training, and information technology support services. The impact of these cuts and other NYS changes in 2009 is estimated at more than \$6 million, including a more than \$2 million cut in our Child Care Block Grant allocation in SFY 2008-09, and expected to be carried forward in SFY 2009-10, thereby negatively impacting our budget by \$4M as a result of rollover funds needed to cover shortfalls in 2008, and no longer available in 2009. As result of the loss of revenue, low income and Title XX day care are budgeted with only modest increases from projected expenses in 2008.

The ongoing turmoil in the economy, increased inflation, growing unemployment rates, and the overall cost of living in our region all continue to heavily influence the Department's outlook regarding caseloads and the expected needs of the community in 2009. As a result of these factors, the Department is proposing necessary additions in the Temporary Assistance arena. Specifically:

- Temporary Assistance applications have grown dramatically, with a more than 7% increase in temporary assistance applications registered through October, 2008, when compared to the same period in 2007 (from 15,289 to 16,379 during the respective ten month periods). This is in addition to a 23% increase in total applications registered between 2006 and 2007 (from 14,663 to 18,079 applications).
- Consequently, after a decade of decline since implementation of welfare reform, temporary assistance caseloads are growing, climbing from a low of 5,746 in December, 2007, to 6,041 in October, 2008 (an increase of 295 cases or more than 5% in ten months).
- As a result of application trends and the current economic condition, the caseload is projected to grow to 7,225 by December, 2009.

A number of other important program initiatives impacting the proposed budget continue to be primarily reimbursable through State and Federal funding. Examples include:

- Medicaid Fraud, Waste, and Abuse – In cooperation with the New York State Department of Health and Office of the Medicaid Inspector General, we have implemented a comprehensive Medicaid compliance program through a contract with IPRO (Island Peer Review Organization, Inc.), a highly qualified firm with statewide expertise, to analyze data, audit providers, and conduct investigations in order to identify Medicaid fraud, waste, and abuse, and seek recovery of misspent Medicaid dollars. In 2008, IPRO conducted 25 audits resulting in preliminary federal, state, and local recovery amounts approaching \$6 million. In 2009, we expect to complete approximately 30 additional audits.
- Medicaid Services (local share capped in 2006, with non-compounded annual increases) – Medicaid eligible cases grew tremendously during the early part of the decade, but had leveled by 2007 at just over 100,000 individuals. However, through the end of 2008 and into 2009, we expect to see a significant increase (approximately 6%) as a result of New York State initiatives and a growing need for services.
- Food Stamps Enrollment – the Food Stamp caseload has continued to grow, increasing more than 21% between June 2006 (15,705 cases), and October 2008 (19,493 cases). As a result of current New York State initiatives to increase enrollment and the additional need of the population, this caseload is projected to further grow in 2009.

## Tax Levy Increase

The 2008 adopted DSS tax levy was \$ 293,206,974. The 2009 budget proposal before the Board of Legislators, proposes a tax levy of \$294,575,815, an increase of \$1,368,841 or less than 1%.

## Expenditure Highlights

Salary and Other Operating Expenses: The proposed 2009 budget contains a decrease of more than \$1.8 million in salary and other operating expenses, including:

- Personnel Services: This item increased by \$1,183,529 (1.5%), from \$79,177,615 in 2008, to \$80,361,144 in 2009. Projected salary increases as a result of an expected union settlement were offset by a reduction of 21 operating lines and vacancy savings.
- Other Operating Expenses (including equipment and supplies): This item decreased by \$2,773,027 (20%), from \$13,887,896 in 2008, to \$11,114,869 in 2009.
- Interdepartmental Expenditures: This item decreased by \$235,777 (.5%), from \$43,306,315 in 2008, to \$43,070,538 in 2009.

## Relief Accounts

- Emergency Assistance to Families (EAF): The proposed 2009 budget contains a decrease of \$7,438,000 (19%), from \$39,438,000 in 2008, to \$32,000,000 in 2009, primarily associated with fewer children qualifying for EAF-funded foster care, and a case management initiative designed to work with children in the most appropriate and cost-effective levels of care.
- Child Welfare: The proposed 2009 budget contains a decrease of \$220,400 (.5%), from \$48,179,400 in 2008, to \$47,959,000 in 2009.
- Family Assistance: The proposed 2009 budget contains an increase of \$945,000 (2%), from \$43,562,000 in 2008, to \$44,507,000 in 2009.
- Safety Net: The proposed 2009 budget contains an increase of \$925,000 (2%), from \$56,888,000 in 2008, to \$57,813,000 in 2009.
- Indirect Social Services (Purchase of Services & Low Income Day Care): The proposed 2009 budget contains a decrease of \$1,938,008 (5%), from \$42,032,008 in 2008, to \$40,094,000 in 2009.
- Title XX Day Care: The proposed 2009 budget contains a decrease of \$59,124 (2%), from \$2,924,124 in 2008, to \$2,865,000 in 2009.
- Medicaid: The proposed 2009 budget contains an increase of \$2,405,348 from \$195,260,916 in 2008, to \$197,666,264 in 2009, as required by the cap.