

Westchester County  
Department of Social Services

2010

Budget Presentation

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Commissioner

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## **Westchester County Department of Social Services 2010 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.

### **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 reduction of 217 total staff (15%) since 1998, while continuing necessary programs; 2) 7,178 fewer Temporary Assistance cases compared to February, 1998 (a 52% decrease); 3) a 52% reduction in the shelter population since 1998, resulting in the closure of three sites; and, 4) the use of Information Technology strategies and systems to more effectively manage caseloads and services (e.g., electronic Medicaid decision support; electronic case scanning and indexing; a case note dictation system; use of wireless laptops in the field; case management, day care and housing management systems; and development of an automated application system to be implemented in 2010).

### **2010 Budget Highlights**

The Department's 2010 budget request of \$578,100,181 represents an increase of \$16.5M (2.9%) from the 2009 adopted budget due to a number of factors summarized below, yet provides for a tax levy decrease of \$21.7M (7.4%) as a result of the continued FMAP increase in 2010.

The Department has taken a careful and prudent approach to developing its request while maintaining important and necessary 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. Our mission continues to guide our actions and this budget reflects a vigilant and smart vision for the Westchester County Department of Social Services. Although the Department is continuing to maximize efficiencies and effectively manage controllable costs, and has recognized savings in Child Welfare as a result of new case management strategies, several factors are significantly impacting the Department's 2010 request, including:

1. An expected \$7.2M increase in the local share of Medicaid associated with the cap.
2. Growing emergency assistance needs, and JD/PINS placed in care, resulting in a net EAF increase of \$1.5M.
3. Continued growth in Temporary Assistance caseloads, coupled with a State-mandated benefit increase, resulting in \$9.6M in additional Family and Safety Net Assistance expenses.
4. Continued growth in utilization of child day care slots, resulting in an Indirect/Purchase of Service and Title XX Day Care net increase of \$4.1M.
5. Personnel expenses in support of essential operations, including employee contract settlements, resulting in a net increase of \$1.1M.
6. Reductions in State aid associated with the mandated Child Welfare Threshold increase in the Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS), resulting in an impact of \$3M.

The ongoing uncertainty in the economy, 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 2010. Specific factors indicative of current economic trends as we approach 2010 include:

- Continued high levels of monthly Temporary Assistance applications registered through October, 2009 (similar rate when compared to the same period in 2008), with a more than 32% increase in total applications registered between 2006 and 2008 (from 14,663 to 19,417 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 6,720 in October, 2009 (an increase of 974 cases or 17% in 22 months).
- Growing Food Stamp caseloads Countywide, increasing from 17,205 in December, 2007, to 25,983 in October, 2009 (an increase of 8,778 cases or 51% in only 22 months). This is in addition to caseload growth of 1,340 cases or more than 8% in 2007.
- An increase in Low Income and Title XX funded child day care slots, climbing to a combined average of 2,623 monthly slots through the first ten months of 2009, compared to an average of 2,227 slots for the same period in 2008, an increase of 18%.

## **2009 Key Accomplishments**

The Department's 2010 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. Highlighted examples of important accomplishments in 2009 include:

- The Department, in partnership with the Department of Information Technology, is pioneering the development of an Automated Application System as a means of transforming the current paper recertification process for Temporary Assistance (TA) customers into an automated process using state-of-the-art information technology and systems. Once developed and tested, the model can be expanded to Medicaid and Food Stamp customers. This innovative process, the first in New York State, will enable customers to independently complete their recertification interview through the use of user-friendly kiosks in district offices and partner sites, a web-based online application, or an automated phone system. This system is being developed in response to growing customer demand and increasing caseloads; and the need for increased efficiency, quality assurance, and cost-effectiveness using the latest available technologies to improve services while containing current costs and recognizing future savings. The cost benefits to the Department and County are significant, starting with immediate cost avoidance of \$1.6M in 2010 alone, by increasing caseload capacity and eliminating the Department's immediate need for additional staff. Once the system is fully implemented, the Department anticipates future savings associated with reduced staffing and operating costs, as well as decreased error rates and possible disallowances and sanctions. Other benefits include reduced emissions associated with customer travel to and from district offices, reduced paper usage, and increased linkages with community-based organizations as satellite sites for access to the system.

- In cooperation with the New York State Department of Health and Office of the Medicaid Inspector General, the Department continues implementation of 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. Since implementation in 2006, IPRO has conducted 52 audits, thru September, 2009, resulting in preliminary federal, state, and local recovery amounts approaching \$6.6 million.
- DSS in partnership with the Yonkers and Mt Vernon School Districts, The Westchester County Family Court Judges, The District Attorney's Office, the Yonkers and Mt. Vernon Police Departments and the City of Yonkers and Mt Vernon have commenced a "Chronic Truancy" Program. During the two years that Yonkers' new educational neglect reporting process has been implemented, the number of chronic truants (i.e. students with 20 or more unexcused absences in a single school year) in our targeted grades (grades 1-8) in the Yonkers Public Schools has dropped by approximately 18%. The fall of 2009 will be the first full semester for the Mt. Vernon initiative, where we look forward to similar results.

## **Tax Levy Decrease**

The 2009 adopted DSS tax levy was \$294,874,675. The 2010 budget proposal before the Board of Legislators, proposes a tax levy of \$273,175,181 a decrease of \$21,699,494 or 7.4%.

## **Expenditure Highlights**

Salary and Other Operating Expenses: The proposed 2010 budget contains a net decrease of \$2.1 million in salary and other operating expenses, including:

- **Personnel Services:** This item increased by \$1,536,312 (1.9%), from \$80,302,004 in 2009, to \$81,838,316 in 2010. Projected salary increases are offset by reductions in overtime, and targeted vacancy savings. In addition, two vacant clerical lines were abolished.
- **Other Operating Expenses (including equipment and supplies):** This item decreased by \$3,539,424 (31%), from \$11,329,869 in 2009, to \$7,790,445 in 2010, primarily due to the transfer of secure detention services to the Probation Department, as well as reductions in equipment and other operating expenses.
- **Interdepartmental Expenditures:** This item decreased by \$52,592 (less than 1%), from \$43,070,538 in 2009, to \$43,017,946 in 2010.

Relief Accounts

- Emergency Assistance to Families (EAF): The proposed 2010 budget contains an increase of \$1,497,000 (4.7%), from \$32,000,000 in 2009, to \$33,497,000 in 2010, primarily associated with growing emergency assistance needs, and JD-PINS placed in care.
- Child Welfare: The proposed 2010 budget contains a decrease of \$3,792,600 (7.9%), from \$47,959,000 in 2009, to \$44,166,400 in 2010, primarily associated with the transfer of non-secure detention services to the Probation Department, as well as a modest decline in foster care caseloads and continuous efforts to place children in the most appropriate levels of care.
- Family Assistance: The proposed 2010 budget contains an increase of \$4,734,000 (10.6%), from \$44,507,000 in 2009, to \$49,241,000 in 2010, primarily associated with projected caseload growth and State-mandated benefit increases.
- Safety Net: The proposed 2010 budget contains an increase of \$4,849,000 (8.4%), from \$57,813,000 in 2009, to \$62,662,000 in 2010, primarily associated with projected caseload growth and State-mandated benefit increases.
- Indirect Social Services (Purchase of Services & Low Income Day Care): The proposed 2010 budget contains an increase of \$3,150,507 (7.8%), from \$40,194,000 in 2009, to \$43,344,507 in 2010, primarily due to caseload growth in low income day care and increased cost of care, offset by an increase in the parent share to 15%.
- Title XX Day Care: The proposed 2010 budget contains an increase of \$996,000 (34.8%), from \$2,865,000 in 2009, to \$3,861,000 in 2010, primarily due to caseload growth and the increased cost of care, offset by an increase in the parent share to 15%.
- Medicaid: The proposed 2010 budget contains an increase of \$7,209,303 (3.6%) from \$197,666,264 in 2009, to \$204,875,567 in 2010, as required by the cap.