



# Onondaga County Legislature

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Chairman

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## WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE REVIEW OF THE 2025 TENTATIVE BUDGET BUDGET REVIEW DAY 6 – SEPTEMBER 19, 2024 COLLEEN A. GUNNIP, CHAIR

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mr. May, Mr. Ryan, Ms. Abbott, Mr. Romeo, Mr. Knapp, Mr. Garland  
**ALSO ATTENDING:** Chairman Burtis, Mr. Meaker, Ms. Cody, Ms. Harvey, Mr. Olson, Mr. McCarron, Mr. Bush, Dr. Kelly, Mr. Brown; also please see attached

Chair Gunnip called the meeting to order at 9:43 a.m.

**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES:** Amy Cunningham, Commissioner; Jennifer Parmalee, Deputy Commissioner; Kelly Varamogiannis, Deputy Commissioner

### 2024 INITIATIVES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- *Onondaga County DCFS School Based Initiatives funding continues to support ALL school districts within the County by providing approximately \$17 million in program funding for mental health services that include ACCESS Liaisons, Promise Zone Specialists, and Family Support Specialists. These services within schools assist students and their families with challenges they may be experience. These funds also continue to support School Based Mental Health Clinics that provide clinical services to students.*
- *DCFS and E911 have continued to work closely with community partners to implement the 911/988 Persons in Crisis (PIC) program to divert Police responses from 911 calls to Mobile Crisis teams. In conjunction with our partners in Law Enforcement, the City of Syracuse, Contact Community Services, St. Joseph’s Hospital and Liberty Resources, Onondaga County is working to ensure that PIC calls made to 911/988 are responded to with trained mental health professionals and individuals with lived experience.*
- *The Child Welfare Division has been working closely with school districts to strengthen partnerships and providing training on the Child Welfare system.*
- *While at Hillbrook, fourteen youth have obtained regents diplomas in the past three years.*
- *The Syracuse/Onondaga County Youth Bureau expanded Youth Sports services with increased funding to community partners to support non-traditional sports programming and team sports programming.*
- *DCFS expanded contract monitoring and data collection and analysis in order to make informed decisions and improve outcomes for children and families. The contract administration team works closely with service providers to support the development and implementation of the Results Based Accountability framework.*
- *DCFS facilitated a County-wide School Threat Assessment training for all school districts and established Level 1 and Level 2 Threat Assessment Teams in collaboration with Onondaga County Sheriff’s Office.*

### 2024 BUDGET REVIEW

*As a department, DCFS is projected to be within budget for 2024, with the exception of salaries and mandated programs (foster care) where increased rates and case counts are resulting in increased costs and overtime wages.*

### 2025 BUDGET OVERVIEW

*The 2025 budget includes standard salary and wage increases consistent with the baseline budgeting approach. Also included in the base are increased costs in supplies, contractual services, all other, maintenance utilities & rents and professional services due to inflation and contract escalators. Mandated Programs are also increased in the 2025 budget as result of increased Foster Care costs that are driven by OCFS rate increases and number of children in foster care.*

*Additional increases to the 2025 budget include the creation of 10 Case Worker positions and 5 Case Worker Assistant positions in Child Welfare and approximately \$900,000 in contractual expenses to expand Child Welfare supervised visitation and preventive services.*

#### 2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- *Expand Child Welfare Division by adding 10 additional Case Worker positions and create 5 new Case Worker Assistant positions in order to address the increased case complexities in the community and provide administrative support to front-line staff*
- *Continue to develop and identify resources for a foster care prevention plan that centers family voice and provides accessible, effective services to families within their respective communities*
- *Continued and ongoing engagement with school districts throughout the County to implement School Based Mental Health Services in all districts*
- *Continue to recruit and retain staff who are committed to serving children and families so that all are successful in the home, school, and community*
- *Facilitate planning for construction of a new educational building at Hillbrook Juvenile Detention Center in collaboration with Onondaga County Facilities Management*
- *Continue collaborations with other Human Services Departments within the County to develop strategies to better serve children and families*
- *Implement a new federal System of Care grant to address the needs of dually diagnosed children and youth to better serve them in the community*
- DCFS consists of Child Welfare, Mental Health, Juvenile Justice, School-Based Initiatives, Youth Bureau
  - Child Welfare
    - Number of field staff on OT (overtime) has doubled due to increased safety risks
    - All after hours, nights and weekends are covered with OT
    - In the past, 2 night service workers went out independently
      - Currently 4 night service workers go out in pairs on OT
  - Hillbrook
    - 3 shift program that has seen increase in mandated OT
  - Contractual Expenses
    - Additions include an increase of \$1.4M for reimbursable Mental Health and Substance Use services
      - These services are fully funded by the state
    - The remaining \$1M is funding for expansion of Supervised Visitation, Preventive Services, Child Welfare
      - Need increased Supervised Visitation in order to address the increased number of children in Foster Care
  - Professional Services
    - Increased by \$300K due to aftercare for youth that are stepping down from residential placements
      - Part of the Federal Family First legislation
  - Awarded the Federal System of Care grant
    - Will provide \$4M over 4 years to help serve youth who are dually diagnosed with:
      - Serious emotional disturbances
      - Intellectual or developmental disabilities

#### Questions/comments from the Committee:

- Will this help with caseload but not with OT?
  - Night service OT will continue going into the field in pairs
  - With increased staff, hope to not send additional pair out as frequently
  - Hillbrook is about stabilizing the 101 staff
    - Once stabilized, will not need to rely on mandated OT as much
- How is Foster Care going?
  - It is definitely challenging for families and the community; it is not just a Child Welfare specific issue
  - Have developed a Community Engagement Committee with stakeholders throughout the community
  - Fortunate to have Mental Health and Substance Use programs to collaborate with the Health Department
  - Preventive funds need to be used where the needs are in order to keep children at home instead of in Foster Care

- Child Welfare positions are emotionally and physically challenging
- Is there a concern about filling the positions?
  - Have 15 vacancies now and have been successful at filling positions over the last couple years
  - Have created a supportive environment where people are committed to come to work
  - Very challenging work; at times it is defeating where people want to walk away
  - Try to provide staff with the support they need when something challenging happens
  - Retaining staff is challenging
    - Looking for the right people that want to be in it for the long haul
    - The new workforce is not necessarily looking for full career, young folks are trying out different things
- Glad DCFS has support for staff but very concerned for the folks that do this type of work everyday
- The job is very important and appreciate that there are people that want to do the work
- Would like to encourage the continuation and building of the staff support system
- Let the Legislature know if a budgetary situation arises
- Will Foster Care continue at the same pace or is it leveling off?
  - Working with judges to try and address the lengths of stay in care
  - Supervised Visitation is court ordered and part of the increase in Contractual Expenses
    - Parents on a wait list will delay the return home
    - Addressing gaps and barriers will help kids return home sooner
  - As class action suit was the cause of the state increase a few years ago
  - 2023 Actual Foster Care line was \$49.7M
  - The \$9M increase is not reflective of the projected increase in the number of kids in Foster Care next year
    - The increase will not be \$8M or \$9M per year
- When the recommendation in staffing was made, was there a number given as to how many were needed?
- How was the 10 and 5 number reached?
  - 10 Case Workers:
    - Did historical analysis of caseloads
    - Considered a percentage of people that would be on vacation or medical
    - If all positions were filled and fully trained, the 10 added positions would provide a cushion
    - 60-70% of current investigators have 1-3 years of experience
      - These employees are considered Caseworkers on the roster, but not taking a full caseload
  - 5 Case Worker Assistants:
    - These are brand new positions
    - Want to see how and where they will work and what they can do
    - Possibly taking some paperwork off the Case Worker workload or doing all office work
- Is there a maximum number of new cases each Case Worker should have?
  - The state regulates Child Welfare and do not provide specific case numbers
    - There are recommendations and numbers used as a guideline, but differ amongst cases and program area
    - Also talk to other counties to see what they are receiving
- Glad Case Workers are being added and anxious to support this
  - It is rewarding work; there are good days and very happy days
- Compared to 2022, we are hearing a lot of information and data that is supporting the decision being made
- It was stated in a previous comment that there is a formulaic approach to determine how many people are needed
- Is experience and skill level a bigger driver behind the number of Case Workers needed when adding the Assistants?
  - Yes, that was factored into analysis
  - For example, experienced Investigators can take 12-15 cases per month, a new one can take 8 per month
  - Retaining 149 Case Workers would allow inexperienced workers to have lower case loads
- Is there a way to estimate the need in the community that is not being addressed?
  - Management team works with different committees throughout the community
  - Last year the Early Childhood Alliance helped with community outreach and engagement
    - Helped to know what families want and need

- Ms. Parmalee does annual plan and engages with clients of different programs and services
- Will try to engage community in meaningful ways with Preventive dollars
- Do not want to throw money at programs that families do not want or need
- Are DCFS Mental Health services available in all school districts?
  - Yes
- Is educational neglect the responsibility of the county?
  - If a report is called into the state central register, it goes to Albany, then sent to Onondaga County intake
- Given the overwhelming numbers associated with educational neglect, how does the county take that on?
  - Absenteeism does not translate to all CPS cases
  - School Districts have to go through several steps before the state central register will accept a report
  - Although the county gets a substantial amount, there are probably not as many as you would think
  - At the table with DSS-ES and school districts addressing the needs of educational neglect
- There is more than 1,000 kids in Syracuse who miss more than 100 days of school every year
- Educational neglect is around 15 days
  - Have Access team in each school with an upcoming attendance program within SCSD
  - Have McKinney-Vento liaison for absenteeism with homeless families
  - Educational neglect is being talked about and trying to address it
- Is there a decrease of more than \$1M in State Aid – Public Safety?
- If so, what is the plan to recoup?
- How does that affect operations?
  - That is specific to Hillbrook
    - Based on split in youth residents that are Raise the Age vs. non Raise the Age
    - Need to project how many residents will be 13-15 years old and how many will be 16-17 years old
    - 13-15 get reimbursed at 49%, 16-17 get reimbursed at 100%
    - The ratio has shifted; projecting the split has fewer 16-17 year olds
- Will the county be asked to make up the gap?
  - Finance
    - State Aid – Public Safety has a decrease
    - State Aid – Social Services has an increase
      - One line going down and one going up is because of the split

## **HEALTH DEPARTMENT:** Dr. Katheryn Anderson, Commissioner; Michelle Mignano, Deputy Commissioner

### 2024 INITIATIVES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

#### **Lead Poisoning Prevention**

- *Facilitated and expanded access to childhood lead testing in the community:*
  - *5,813 tested total in Onondaga County from Jan-June 2024 (175 more than had been tested at this time in 2023)*
  - *On track to exceed annual number of children tested in [2020-2023](#)*
- *Facilitated and expanded access to childhood lead testing through direct testing by OCHD:*
  - *390 children tested by the OCHD Lead Program so far in 2024, at 45 different testing events (includes testing on the van and at indoor community sites)*
  - *Lead van: 18 unique locations visited by the lead van in 2024, including routine presence at WIC Gifford St, Syracuse Community Health, and White Branch Library*
  - *Site-based, indoor testing: provided regularly at Sankofa, Tucker Missionary Baptist Church, Head Start, and WIC satellite locations*
  - *Partnered with SCSD to perform lead testing at 5 preschools, with 140+ children tested*
- *Introduced a publicly available dashboard for childhood lead data (<http://ongov.net/health/lead/data.html>)*
- *Facilitated access to window and door replacement services for impacted families*
- *Received grant funding from NYSDOH to establish a lead rental registry*

**Opioid Overdose Prevention Program (Mental Health and Substance Use Initiatives)**

- Responded to worsening fentanyl epidemic, and emergence of xylazine, in our community by providing access to Narcan, drug test strips, and expanded peer support services
- Initiated mobile outreach program for drug user health and syringe services

**Healthy Families**

- Onondaga County WIC continues to be one of the leaders in the state in achieving / surpassing target numbers for families served

**Bureau of Disease Control**

- Established a novel refugee-immigrant health hub, to facilitate streamlined access to care for newly-arrived immigrant and refugees in Onondaga County
- Engaged in extensive community outreach and educational programming related to increased rates of sexually transmitted infections across NYS, including HIV
- Expanded back-to-school vaccine clinics for children at risk of school exclusion

**Medical Examiner's Office**

- The MEO continues to play a vital role in determining cause and manner of death for Onondaga County residents, including provision of critical overdose-related data.
- OCMEO Chief Forensic Investigator Brian Ehret was named Medicolegal Death Investigator of the year from the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME)

**Forensic Laboratories**

- Implemented new data monitoring systems to improve efficiency across divisions: Firearms, DNA, Digital Evidence, and Latent Prints
- The Labs continued to link putative perpetrators to crime scene evidence and among cases using and entering data in CODIS (DNA), SABIS (fingerprints), and NIBIN (ballistics).

**Environmental Health**

- Received \$1.4 million in JUUL settlement dollars to support vape enforcement and education

**2024 BUDGET REVIEW**

The Health Department is operating well within the 2024 budget.

**2025 BUDGET OVERVIEW**

The 2025 budget includes standard salary and wage increases consistent with the baseline budgeting approach. Also included in the base are increased costs in supplies, all other and maintenance utilities & rents due to inflation and contract escalators. The 2025 budget includes an increase to the Special Children Services line as both Early Intervention and Preschool have seen an increase in the number of children receiving services along with rate increases. The budget also reflects minor adaptations to our structure, staffing, and activities. These changes are largely supported by grant or settlement dollars and are necessary to proactively respond to priority health issues. The ongoing crisis of substance use touches every program in the department, from clinical operations to forensics. Opioid settlement funds are proposed to build out the substance use disorder single point of entry program (SUD-SPOA), as previously established through the County RFP process. Additionally, we propose to utilize opioid settlement funds to partially support the medical examiner's office (MEO). Lead remains one of our highest priorities, with OCHD activities including testing of children, case management, testing of homes, and linkages to resources for risk reduction. New NYSDOH grant funds (the 'Rental Registry') will be used to identify rental homes requiring lead inspection in Onondaga County, to coordinate with the City and other partners to complete required inspections, to test and support impacted children, and to liaise with and support landlords through any necessary lead hazard reduction activities. Finally, the nationwide shortages of primary care providers (PCPs) and PCP appointments have forced the OCHD into new clinical areas as our community's 'gap filler' in health, requiring expansions of immunization, infectious disease testing, and treatment services. Clinical operations will undergo necessary adaptations to meet the specific needs of our community in immunization services, New American health, and wound care (the latter relating to the opioid epidemic).

**2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

- Lead
- Substance use
- Maternal-infant health
- Health Equity and Access to Services

- *Advancing mobile community outreach for multiple programs*
- *Streamlining and integrating referrals and linkages to resources*
- *Collaborating with partners and providers to meet the needs of our EI families*

### **High points for OCHD budget (Presented by Dr. Anderson)**

*OCHD has been busy on all fronts in supporting the health needs of our community in 2024, across our diverse state mandated activities, grant programs, and local initiatives.*

*When we were here a year ago, we identified major strategic priorities for 2024 as lead, substance use, maternal-infant health, and early intervention / preschool. Committed to tackling these issues with a goal of eliminating disparities.*

*In reporting our progress, I'll begin with lead, as one of our most important and complex local health issues, for which county programs have thankfully benefitted from an influx of local and state funding. Between the health department and community development, 2024 was a busy and impactful year at the county for lead-related initiatives.*

- *OCHD facilitated and expanded access to childhood lead testing through connection to community providers and are currently on track to achieve highest numbers of kids tested over last 5 years.*
- *OCHD engaged in direct testing of 390 children through the lead van and site based testing at 45 different events.*
  - *Lead van: 18 unique locations visited by the lead van in 2024, including routine presence at WIC Gifford St, Syracuse Community Health, and White Branch Library*
  - *Site-based, indoor testing: provided regularly at Sankofa, Tucker Missionary Baptist Church, Head Start, and WIC satellite locations*
  - *Partnered with SCS D to perform lead testing at 5 preschools, with 140+ children tested*
- *OCHD introduced a public-facing dashboard on our website for transparent data sharing <http://ongov.net/health/lead/latestdata.html#yeartodate>*
- *OCHD Researched and advanced best local model for Lead it go, which will provide developmental supports to children with elevated blood lead levels who do not qualify for other programs. Completing our hiring, set to begin enrollment by the end of the year.*
- *Under the leadership of Jessica Vinceguerra, County Director of Lead Operations, the county increased their efforts to get to the root of the problem – namely, in mitigating the threats posed by lead paint in aging houses. With a goal of increasing the pool of lead-certified contactors, the County began doing EPA lead remediation trainings in mid-2023 – identified local trainer, training is free of charge. Plugged into networks (Lead CNY Coalition and others). 299 EPA certificates issued since July 2023. 9 new contractors at community development as a result.*
- *Comm dev: HUD grant - 198 units cleared (Benchmark = 210) since 2020, 29 under contract*
- *Foster care homes – set aside funding to help families who wish to foster kids clear lead hazards. Expedited process, increases access to resources for those who may not qualify for HUD support. 2 done, 5 more in pipeline.*

*In substance use initiatives:*

- *We continue our community facing efforts to*
- *IN 2024, to date, we have distributed nearly 3000 doses of Narcan, 330 client enrolled in our community-based syringe services program, 78 long-term clients served by the peer program, in addition to countless short term interventions for individuals who were not established clients.*
- *Last week, with funding from OASAS, implemented our overdose response team in collaboration with AMR, wherein our team will accompany them in responding to overdoses and link willing individuals to support services. This has already had an impactful and positive reception, including supporting individuals in the hospital and eliciting contacts from impacted community members who had received our information from AMR after hours.*

*Early Intervention and preschool special education:*

- *Overall, numbers of children being served in these programs are increasing since COVID – this is reflected in increasing expenditures within SCS, and is a positive trend across both EI and preK*

- *Wait lists remain an issue, for EI and preK, with disparities in service provision most notably to City children. Priorities for 2025 are to increase the local provider pool and to eliminate these disparities in access. As an example of proactive efforts, we have begun hosting bi-annual provider recruitment webinars, targeted to recent graduates, to familiarize local providers with EI and preK programs and ways to get involved.*

*In maternal-infant health:*

- *The OC WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program continues to be one of a few WIC programs in the state that consistently surpasses expected targets for numbers of eligible participants served, while continuing to engage in active recruitment and to provide high quality service*
- *The Healthy Families Division successfully recompeted for a renewal of their Syracuse Healthy Start grant, a 5 year grant from HRSA focused on supporting the health of moms and infants in under-resourced zip codes in Syracuse.*

*OCHD is operating well within 2024 budget.*

*Looking ahead to the 2025 budget, we continue to prioritize these same public health issues, with growth into new programmatic areas that are supported by sustaining external funding.*

*The ongoing crisis of substance use touches every program in the department, from clinical operations to forensics. Opioid settlement funds are proposed to build out the substance use disorder single point of entry program (SUD-SPOA), as previously established through the County RFP process. Additionally, we propose to utilize opioid settlement funds to partially support the medical examiner's office (MEO).*

*Lead remains one of our highest priorities, with OCHD activities including testing of children, case management, testing of homes, and linkages to resources for risk reduction. New NYSDOH grant funds (the 'Rental Registry') will be used to identify rental homes requiring lead inspection in Onondaga County, to coordinate with the City and other partners to complete required inspections, to test and support impacted children, and to liaise with and support landlords through any necessary lead hazard reduction activities.*

*Finally, the nationwide shortages of primary care providers (PCPs) and PCP appointments have forced the OCHD into new clinical areas as our community's 'gap filler' in health, requiring expansions of immunization, infectious disease testing, and treatment services. Clinical operations will undergo necessary adaptations to meet the specific needs of our community in immunization services, New American health, and wound care (the latter relating to the opioid epidemic).*

#### **Questions/comments from the Committee:**

- Great that there so many ongoing and new initiatives along with new money coming in
- Special Children Services – Which program or initiative is main driver of the 10+% increase?
  - Finance
    - The line represents Pre-School and Early Intervention Services for kids
    - There has been an increase in services as well as rate increases established by NYS
- Contractual Expenses - What is the \$3M jump?
  - Finance
    - Opioid Settlement dollars and Lead Registry program
- Other Misc. Revenues – Which program is this associated with \$4M?
  - Finance
    - Opioid Settlement dollars and Lead Registry program
- Please explain the types of movement in the roster?
  - New positions and changes are supported by either the Opioid Settlement or Rental Registry grant funds
  - Local dollars are offset by un-funding other positions
- Where does the Health Department stand with vacancies?
  - Continue to struggle in terms of public health nursing and staffing
  - HELP program has been helpful in filling vacancies

- Are Fellows being eliminated?
  - NYSDOH implemented a time limited Public Health Fellows Program during COVID; it ended in June
    - Many of them have since been hired into the department
- With the investment in Lead mitigation through Community Development, has a correlation in testing been seen?
  - The last 10 years has seen a steady improvement in the percentage of children testing with elevated lead levels
  - Have had progress over the last couple years getting to root of the problem
- Legislator Cody Kelly is a proponent of Early Intervention and CPSE
- Legislature voted to up the provider pool by increasing reimbursement rates to private providers
- Pre-school visits are reimbursed at a lesser rate than home visits
- Is this something the Health Department is considering that would incentivize private providers?
- Why are there reimbursement disparities?
  - Some neighboring counties have same rate
  - Given the waitlist and disparities, do not want to propose a solution that creates another unanticipated problem
  - Has been a big topic over the last 3 months
  - Trying to think carefully through what the impacts would be
  - Will continue to explore; there will be more to come on that subject
- What would be a potential secondary problem be to updating the reimbursement rates?
  - Still in the discussion phase of different options
  - Considerations would be:
    - What is the best model that serves the most children and how to fit those together
    - Want to think carefully about equity and sustainability in terms of maintaining programs
- What is meant by sustainability?
  - Cost perspective
- The 1<sup>st</sup> round of the Opioid Settlement money was released into the community last year
- Getting ready to release a 2<sup>nd</sup> round, is there data to show that it is helping?
  - Do not have data today
  - Money has gone into supporting programs within the county and outside the county and has increased partnerships
- Are overdose numbers decreasing?
  - Hard to predict because the data lags by a few months
  - On track to not see an increase in overdose deaths this year
    - Not sure if reduction will be significant
- In 2019, Lead testing stopped for 1 and 2 year olds at WIC locations, has it started back up again?
- Per an editorial, the Lead van testing numbers were low last year, has that changed?
  - Lead testing stopped at WIC because it was not in alignment with NYS WIC policy
  - We are back onsite at WIC with the Lead van, just not physically in their space
  - The Lead van is out and active
  - Feedback from community is welcomed, as to places where the van would be well received
  - Trying to test as many children as possible; have been at 45 different events this year
    - It is not clear if parents want their children's finger pricked at big events

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES – ECONOMIC SECURITY:** Sarah Merrick, Commissioner; Brian Lynch, Director Administrative Services

#### 2024 INITIATIVES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

*As of September 2024, served over 100,000 unique County residents with one or more programs and assisted over 60,000 visitors (or daily average of 362) that have come to the Civic Center. In addition, handling over 105,000 calls regarding assistance, 36% of these calls have been in the SNAP program. The Temporary Assistance caseload has exceeded 5,000, a number we have not seen since 2019. A major factor is an increase in refugees being resettled in our county. Refugees represent 27% of the cases, a 16% increase from the low in 2020. The new TA Employment case management system (VenTek) went live this Spring. TA Employment is on pace to get nearly 1,600 clients employed and a record setting 440 plus clients approved for SSI/SSD benefits. A yearlong marketing campaign worked to inform working parents about the*



affordability of childcare with nearly 3,000 families receiving assistance. This represents a 91% increase since the pandemic. In August, added case workers to our homeless/housing unit through the support of Family-Centered Services OTDA grant. As the County's single point of entry for the unhoused, case workers will provide crisis management assistance and a focus on finding permanent housing for the unhoused. Continued to operate the 2Gen Onondaga Poverty Reduction Pilot with 94 families participating. In addition, to twenty-two becoming fully employed, nearly 200 goals around child development, financial empowerment, mental health, housing, education, and social capital are in progress or been achieved. DSS-ES has been notified that OTDA has applied for a Federal waiver that will allow States to pilot alternates to the current mandated approach prescribed in the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. The case management model in the homeless/housing unit and 2Gen Onondaga have been included as models for the State waiver. All of this has been accomplishment with an average vacancy rate of 10% to 15%.

#### 2024 BUDGET REVIEW

The department is projected to be within budget for 2024 aside from our personnel accounts and mandated services. The combination of staffing shortages and requirements to meet State mandated processing times has resulted in overtime and temporary staff accounts being stressed and are currently being projected to exceed budget. We will continue to manage our resources accordingly to ensure we deliver the vital services our department provides while attempting to work within the resources provided. Temporary Assistance programs are seeing increases in caseloads and the NYS Child Care Assistance funding continues to increase to maintain expanded eligibility, with no new local dollars to the County.

#### 2025 BUDGET OVERVIEW

The 2025 budget includes standard salary and wage increases consistent with the baseline budgeting approach and contractual salary increases. Total funded positions increased by nineteen, however, of the 19 funded positions, 16 positions are due to the addition of positions in our housing/homeless unit and anticipated expansion of 2Gen pilot. These positions are fully paid for through NYS grant funds.

**Safety Net and Family Assistance** – Overall caseload has increased. Anticipate in the Federal Year (October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025) settling 1,900 refugees. Anticipate an increase in those on Temporary Assistance and homelessness as rents continue to become unaffordable for those without resources. NYS has not increased the Temporary Assistance rent allowance in over twenty years.

**Daycare** - NYS Child Care Assistance funding continues to increase to maintain eligibility up to 85% SMI (i.e., family of 4 maximum income of \$108,631), a parent share of 1% (ours was 35%), to pay up to 80 absences per year per child (we did not pay for absences in the past), to extend the recertification timeframe from 6 months to 12 months and guarantee continuation of subsidies for 12 months after deemed financially ineligible. In addition, the market rate will be raised on October 1, 2024, increasing the level of reimbursement child care providers will be receiving. As of this date, day care cases have exceeded pandemic enrollment numbers and are trending up.

#### 2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Recruiting and hiring efforts to fill all vacancies to meet projected programming expectations.
- Pending approval by OTDA, implement the Child Poverty Reduction Action Plan programs. These include expanding the 2Gen Onondaga Poverty Reduction initiative, part of the County Executive's PIE agenda, a comprehensive program to break the cycle of poverty in Onondaga County; Landlord engagement, recruitment, and concierge service; Attendance project focused on school absenteeism (lead by DCFS) and Diaper distribution for Temporary Assistance Families.
- Prepare to assist approximately 1,900 refugees in resettling in Onondaga County over the next Federal Fiscal year (October 2024 – September 2025).
- Respond to the rise in family homelessness by expanding shelter/hotel options, increasing wrap around services, and utilizing the Shelter Supplement Program, which enables the county to pay market rate for apartments. It is anticipated that homelessness will continue to increase due to rents increasing 20% to 30% since the Pandemic and NYS not increasing the Temporary Assistance rent allowance in twenty years.
- Rebuild the homeless/housing unit by hiring a supervisor and five case workers to work with Temporary Assistance eligibility staff. These new employees are fully paid for through a new grant through OTDA. Case

*workers will work with homeless clients and the various shelter providers and hotel owners to ensure client safety and to assist in finding permanent housing for these clients.*

- *Pilot new AI technology in SNAP/HEAP. The system will answer calls and gather information from clients. The expected outcome will be freeing up staff time so they can focus on determining eligibility or recertifying eligibility.*
- *Pilot Translate LIVE to provide in-person translation services, as well as, interpreting services for visually and hearing-impaired clients. We see this as a major improvement in customer service.*
- *Focus on developing the supervisory skills of fifty-five (55) supervisors of direct line staff.*
- Staffing shortage
  - Running 40-45 vacancies throughout the year
  - Under pressure from federal and state government to process all applications within 30 days
- Had to push extra earnings to the maximum; have brought back any retiree that would like to come back
- The 102 and 103 lines will be over budget
  - Actively recruiting; hired 52 new employees since the end of August, but have lost 46
  - Have to ask experienced employees to work extra hours
- 2025 will have increases in 3 major areas of the salary line
  - Safety Net caseload
  - Day Care
  - Other Expenses which are mandated state charges that have to be reimbursed to the state
- On pace to process over 55,000 applications (Child Support, Temporary Assistance, SNAP, Medicaid, Day Care)
- Child Support has 27,000 cases
  - Recoup \$45M per year and send out to custodial parent
- Temporary Assistance (TA) has over 5,000 cases
  - Low income people are struggling to pay for food and rent; rent increased 30% since COVID
  - County has the responsibility to house the homeless
  - Last summer, the annual night average was under 350 homeless
    - Starting last summer, saw a rapid increase to 650 homeless in shelters or hotels (singles & families)
    - Average 90 to 100 families in the Salvation Army shelter
    - Using 6 to 8 hotels throughout the county for homeless
    - Received \$650K grant to hire 5 new case managers to help stabilize homeless population
  - Onondaga County is one of the largest refugee resettlement communities in NYS
    - Seeing an increase in Refugee caseload
    - On pace to resettle 1,900 refugees this year and next year
- TA employment is doing well
  - Increasing identifying people who have long term disabilities and unable to work
  - Will end up with record breaking 450 TA clients receiving social security income by the end of the year
  - Client receives higher benefit and comes off caseload
- SNAP cases are over 33,000
- Medicaid cases are over 30,000
- Daycare cases is over 3,000
  - Last year NYS made significant changes to make daycare affordable
  - Family share is now 1%
  - Pay up to 90 absences for children
  - Once a family is eligible, they are almost guaranteed 2-3 years of assistance
  - A family earning up to \$108K per year is eligible for daycare assistance
    - Eligible families will pay a maximum of \$15 per week for 1 or more children in care
  - Need to continue to get the word out for those who are eligible for this benefit
  - Daycare is a top priority for the state
  - Will see very large increase in this budget because the state is working in partnership with the county
- The increase of 10 FTE's is due to a NYS grant for 4 Childhood Poverty Reduction projects
  - 2Gen Pilot Expansion – has been running for 2 ½ years
    - Comprehensive approach with mother and child to try and move out of poverty
    - Started with 16-25 year olds with 1 or more children

- Focuses on health and well-being of mother and child
- Early education and childhood development for the child
- Education and employment pathways for the mother
- Work with father's on employment capabilities and participate in fatherhood programs
- Of 94 families served, 50% did not have a high school degree
  - 11 enrolled in GED courses
  - 20 enrolled in treatment for serious mental health issues
  - 31% are employed
  - 50 of the youngest children are enrolled in Head Start or daycare
  - 16 households are off TA
  - The first cohort will be off any kind of support
    - Will wait to see if they will return to TA at the 6 and 12 month mark
- Looking to double the size of the program
- In a 3 year period will be able to serve 450 families and go up to head of household age 35
- Will then be able to measure if there is a difference between age 25 and 35 heads of household
- CNY Change
  - Working with the Housing and Homeless Coalition of CNY to establish a resource for tenants and landlords
  - Research shows, if 3<sup>rd</sup> party can resolve an issue with tenant, landlord might continue to rent to them
- School Attendance
  - Addresses children in the SCSD who are absent from school 10% or more
  - 7 attendance liaisons will work directly with families to get children to school every day
- Diaper Distribution for TA families
  - Provide free diapers from birth to 3
  - Families are stressed over whether to buy diapers or food; health issues result from dirty diapers
  - Health outcomes are better for children and parents less stressed and more stable
- Finding new ways to fill the gap of 40 staff with process improvement idea
  - EVA Pilot
    - AI product being piloted with the SNAP program
    - Answers calls and provides updates to clients
    - Makes calls to clients and returns client responses to employee
    - Answers staff questions resulting in increased efficiency
  - TranslateLive
    - 37% of TA caseload are refugees
    - Provides something similar to mini iPads for translation
    - Offers a friendlier way to translate and provides better customer service

#### **Questions/comments from the Committee:**

- What is the percentage of workforce that have been employed for less than 3 years?
  - Nearly 30%
  - Gone are the days when 75% of employees have 20 years or more
  - People are coming and trying it for 7 months and leaving, difficult to keep operations running
- Are the 40-45 vacancies all net funded vacancies?
  - Yes
- Great to hear positive results on 2Gen program

#### **Request: DSS-ES to provide the Legislature with the modified budget number to where the year ended (dollars vs. case) and for Safety Net and Caseload from 2019 to present**

- How can the county help solve the retention problem?
- What are the inhibitors?
  - A lot of time is spent entering and looking up information in the computer
    - Looking at 20 different data bases; income, medical etc.
  - Face to face interviews
  - Hard to make this kind of work exciting
  - The state sends new ADM's (instructions) every other week

- Requirements keep being added and never taken away
- Job is more complicated than most know
- Try to engage employees once a month with group activities to increase staff morale
- Support groups for employees run by Licensed Clinical Social Worker on staff
- In the process of trying to figure out how to reach new workforce effectively and keep them engaged
- What does the CNY Change program offer and how is it administered?
  - Creates a landlord liaison where landlord will have 24/7 phone access to a liaison if they agree to rent to a TA client
    - Liaison will help resolve any issues with the tenant
  - Would like to have a tenant liaison who will work with tenant on what the responsibilities are of renting an apartment
  - Other cities have effectively worked this program
- Is there data on how EVA has worked for other communities?
  - 5 other small counties are working with it
  - It is not perfect, but will have more information in 6 months or so
  - If it works, aspects of it can be used in all other program lines within the department
  - It might save staffing down the road, but currently cannot fill vacancies so it will not be replacing people
- How have the kiosks been working?
  - They were helpful, because the department gets 350 to 500 people in person per day
  - NYS decided they were causing a security breach and decommissioned them
  - State has since developed an app where clients can take a picture and upload documents
    - Continue to work with the state on improvements to the app for a more user friendly version
- Is the state is still allowing work to be done over the phone?
  - Yes, limit face to face as much as possible
  - Many clients want face to face
- As far as capital improvements, are all floors renovated and everyone moved?
  - Not yet, 2 is done

**EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS:** Julie Corn, Commissioner; Esteban Gonzalez, Deputy Commissioner

**2024 INITIATIVES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

*Maintained Onondaga County's reputation of successful 911 operations: dispatched emergency calls for service to 94 police, fire and emergency medical service agencies; operated the Onondaga County Interoperable Communications System (OCICS) that serves more than 160 local, county, state, federal and tribal public safety and public service agencies and consists of approximately 9,500 radios.*

*Focus remained on addressing the staffing shortage which resulted from the hiring freeze during COVID. Our Recruitment Team led the hosting of two Emergency Services Career Fairs in conjunction with over 30 agencies. These fairs in conjunction with consistent community career fair and event presence, as well as social media outreach, has expanded our pool of qualified applicants. Our Training Division also held year-round back-to-back new-hire, promotional, and cross-training classes to expand workforce operational capabilities.*

*Nurse Navigation (low-acuity medical call diversion) program continued to grow and operate successfully.*

*Persons-In-Crisis Navigation (low-risk mental health call diversion) pilot program is expanding.*

*Radio template refresh project to update and upgrade radio templates County-wide remains in progress. Law enforcement agencies are complete and focus is now on fire/EMS.*

**2024 BUDGET REVIEW**

*E-911 is forecasted to be within our allocated resources for 2024 aside from our personnel accounts. The department has faced staffing challenges in the recent past and especially throughout 2024. With the churning of employees and the continuous onboarding of new staff, our personnel accounts are being stressed and are currently being projected to exceed budget. We will continue to manage our resources accordingly to ensure we deliver the vital services our department provides while attempting to work within the resources provided.*

## 2025 BUDGET OVERVIEW

*The 2025 budget includes standard salary and wage increases as well as increased cost in maintenance & utilities, and other expenses due to inflation and contract escalators.*

## 2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

*Staff 911 Center with all funded positions for optimal operational strength and reduced overtime. This will be an ongoing process of continuous recruitment.*

*Continue focus on current employees to address issues of retention, stress and fatigue.*

*Continue growth of the Nurse Navigation and Persons-In-Crisis Navigation programs.*

*Complete Radio template refresh project.*

- Not many changes for 2025
- 2 ways to think about E911; 50% technology, 50% people
  - Technology
    - Things are status quo; everything looks good
    - No major requests
  - Staffing
    - Seeing stress on the staffing side of budget
    - Centers nationally have been struggling to hire since COVID
    - People do not want to work nights, weekends, holidays
    - Currently down to 10 vacancies
      - Last spring there were 15 vacancies
      - Last fall there were 20 vacancies
    - It takes 6 months to a year to hire and train somebody
    - Large classes puts stress on the system; too many new people on the floor at once
    - Training is provided in classes of 8, back to back
      - Call Takers receive 8 weeks of classroom training; 12 weeks of on the job training (OJT)
      - Dispatchers go back into class after Call Taker training and then OJT again
      - If not having a new hire class, cross-training and promotional classes are provided
        - Allows more flexibility for supervisors to move people around
          - Ie: if trained to be a Fire Dispatcher, now might be a Fire and Police Dispatcher
    - Supervisors and training staff have done an amazing job with OJT
    - About 75% graduate
      - Class of 8 typically graduates with 5 or 6
      - Retirements happen simultaneously and have normal attrition rate
      - Do not have people leaving in waves; they leave for work-life balance, dream job
    - Hopefully this time next year E911 will be close to being fully staffed
  - Recruitment
    - HELP program has been instrumental in hiring
    - Receive a resume almost every day
    - Recruitment team is out at different events every other week, on social media, career fairs
      - Social media and career fairs are going well
        - Hosted 2 Emergency career fairs; included 30+ public safety agencies across the community
        - Will have another career fair in October
    - Developing feeder programs with OCC, BOCES and some high schools
  - Programs
    - Nurse Navigation
      - At the 3 year mark; going very well
      - Success story for county, will re-up contract
    - Persons in Crisis
      - Mental Health Diversion Program
      - Still in growth mode
      - Work with DCFs, Syracuse Police and Mental Health partners across the county looking for ways to improve process

- Successfully integrating a 988 Crisis Counselor, 11am-7pm (M-F)
  - Would love to see hours expanded in the future
- Looking at models in Portland and Denver to see what other communities are doing
- Radio Template Refresh Project
  - Manage all radio/communications systems for Public Safety agencies (10,000 radios)
  - System templates/channels have not been upgraded in over 10 years
  - Have to physically touch each radio to update; has taken a couple years
  - Succeeded with police radios, currently working on to fire and EMS

**Questions/comments from the Committee:**

- Does E911 know which recruitment approach is working best?
  - Will need more data and to ask how people are finding out about the department
  - Recruitment efforts have been consistent for over a year
  - Resumes skyrocketed when kids got out of school in May of this year
- What are the minimum qualifications for a Call Taker?
  - High school degree or equivalent
- What are the minimum qualifications for a Dispatcher?
  - Associates degree or EMS, Police, or Fire background
- Feeder program is innovative for kids getting jobs
- Has E911 considered going out to the suburbs?
  - Yes, currently have great relationships with local Fire Departments
- Schools partner together to hold career fairs to provide pathways for students not going to college
- Are the salaries adequate for the cost of living?
  - Received a pay increase through CSEA making it more competitive
  - Do not believe salary is a driving factor on whether someone accepts the job or not
  - Overtime can raise salary
- What is the \$295K increase under Maintenance/Utility/Rent for?
  - Standard increases
- What is the budget impact on Persons in Crisis?
  - No cost to E911; reflected in DCFS budget

The meeting was adjourned at 11:38 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



TAMMY BARBER, Deputy Clerk  
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: **WAYS & MEANS BUDGET REVIEW – DAY 6**

DATE: **SEPTEMBER 19, 2024**

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Kristi Smiley	Finance
Stacy Wagner	Health
Jessica Allen	Finance
Kelli A	Finance
Jenn Parulek	DCFS
Katie Anderson	OCHD
Debra Lewis	OCHD
Bob Durr	Law
Ben Yaus	Law
Joe Fratleschi	Legal Counsel
Bridget Voltz	Health
Brittany Welch	OCHD
Mark Costello	OCHD
Terna Gogadze	OCHD
Doug Dowdy	SYRACUSE.COM
Christina Finken	DSS
Julie Corn	911
Esteban Gonzalez	911
Steve Morgan	Finance
Brian Donnelly	CE
Carl Hummel	Personnel
Rachael Russell	OCHD
Sarah Merrick	DSS-ES
Whitney Shepard	DCFS
Ana M. Rosa	DCFS
Billy Varamogiannis	DCFS
Jan Sebejian	Personnel
Beth Mortas	Personnel
Michelle Mignone	Health
MEGANIE DROTT	HEALTH
Sandy Griffin	Health
Coron Espey	Personnel
Emilie Valvo	Personnel
Shawn M. Rush	Envir. Health
Jeff Till	Envir. Health
Sarah Easter's	DSS
Korran Loken	DSS
Brenda Loken	DSS
Luis Escobedo	DSS-ES
John Desantis	Legislature
Darcie Lesniak	Legislature