



CHAMPS NY is a coalition of more than 15 organizations – providers and advocates representing children and families with foster care experience – from across New York State. CHAMPS is grounded in research that shows that loving, supportive families – whether birth, kin, foster or adoptive – are critical to the healthy development of all children. We are dedicated to **advancing policy and practice change** that helps to ensure that when children are unable to remain safely with their parents, they are placed in a family-based setting whenever possible.

Budget Priorities

Ensure that more children in foster care across NYS are placed with relatives or in family-based care, and support and sustain counties' efforts to do so through the Family First Transition Fund.

Why: Research is clear that loving, supportive families – whether birth, kin, foster or adoptive – are critical to the healthy development of all children. This is especially true for children who enter foster care – an experience preceded by the trauma of separation from family and followed by the uncertainty of new surroundings and new expectations. In these circumstances, it is well established that most children do better when placed with a relative or close family friend, or, if none are appropriate, in a supportive, family-based setting.

In this year's budget, New York State should continue and expand its investment to enable counties to sustain and build upon the work begun with last year's budget to support and encourage counties to transition their practice to place more children in foster care with kin or in families, rather than in congregate care. We also recommend changes to the Transition Fund's structure, including a new requirement counties should reinvest a portion of any savings accrued into the child welfare system so that new practices implemented with funds from the Transition Fund are continued.

Recommendation: We urge the Governor to include \$4.5 million in funding for the Family First Transition Fund in the Executive Budget. This \$1.5 million increase over last year's funding would increase the minimum amount for a small county to \$50,000 and enable counties to expand their efforts around kinship foster care, recruitment and retention, and other efforts to better support children in family-based foster care. Further, in order to allow counties to be nimble in their efforts to prepare for Family First Implementation, and sustain efforts begun under the Fund, we urge the State to:

1. Change the disbursement mechanism so that counties do not have to wait for reimbursement.
2. Commit to two years of funding, for a total of \$9 million over two years, so that counties can confidently invest the funding in longer-term commitments, such as personnel. This commitment will also enable the counties to begin to realize savings.
3. Require that county plans demonstrate how efforts initiated under the Transition Fund will be sustained, including a requirement that counties reinvest a minimum of 20%-30% of any savings into the county's child welfare system.

Provide a path to permanency for more children in foster care across New York State through an arrangement that makes sense for them and their families, including through KinGAP.

Why: The research makes clear that, when foster care becomes necessary, children do best when they are able to live with a family, and preferably with relatives or someone with whom they have an existing relationship. KinGAP provides a permanency arrangement for children in kin foster care when neither adoption nor return to family are an option. The current funding mechanism discourages use of KinGAP in many counties. As more children in foster care are placed with relatives, KinGAP will become an increasingly relevant and valuable resource for achieving permanency. By improving its funding mechanism, we can help to ensure that more children can find a stable, well-supported home with kin.

Recommendation: In order to provide an avenue to permanency for more children in foster care with kin across the state, we urge the Governor to establish an open-ended funding stream for KinGAP outside of the Foster Care Block Grant. This new funding line should not reduce funding for the Foster Care Block Grant.

Legislative Priorities

Kinship Firewall

New York State should create “kin-first” firewalls to ensure counties exhaust all possibilities for kin placements and then family based placements before placing children who cannot safely reside with their family of origin in congregate care.

Oversight/Accountability

In order to better ensure that children in foster care, and their caregivers, are connected to the resources and supports to which they are entitled, New York should create a Foster Care Ombudsman. This office would be tasked with answering questions, educating individuals about foster care policies and regulations, receiving complaints, mediating and acting as a liaison between involved parties, searching for real-time resolution and following up to ensure that recommendations and resolution are achieved. Such an office would contribute to better support and accountability to children and families involved in the foster care system, thus leading to better long-term outcomes.