



Onondaga County Legislature

JAMIE McNAMARA
Clerk

TIMOTHY T. BURTIS
Chairman

TAMMY BARBER
Deputy Clerk

401 Montgomery Street • Court House • Room 407 • Syracuse, New York 13202
Phone: 315.435.2070 • onondagacountylegislature@ongov.net • www.ongov.net/legislature

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES – NOVEMBER 19, 2025 CODY M. KELLY, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. McCarron, Mr. Meaker, Ms. Harvey, Mr. Bush
ALSO ATTENDING: Mr. Romeo; also see attached list

Chair Kelly called the meeting to order at 12:31 p.m., and the previous meeting’s minutes were approved.

1. CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES: Amy Cunningham, Commissioner
a. 2025 Transfer Resolution (\$32,000)

***PURPOSE:** The Department of Children and Family Services is requesting to transfer funds between accounts due to additional mandates trainings and hiring new Caseworkers.*

***OBJECTIVE / WORK PLAN:** The Department of Children and Family Services has increased training costs as a result of hiring new Caseworkers, which require mandatory state training. In addition, we have identified new mandated training requirements that must be completed by both new and existing staff. These factors have contributed to unanticipated but necessary increases in training expenditures.*

***FUNDING SOURCE:** The funding will come from the Maintenance, Utilities, and Rents Account*

BUDGET:

<u>Transfer From Account</u>		<u>Amount</u>
694130	Maint., Utilities, Rents	\$32,000
<u>Transfer To Account</u>		<u>Amount</u>
694010	Travel & Training	\$32,000

- Field staff need more CPR and First Aid training
- Hillbrook has extra expenses in Safe Crisis Management and Supervisory training
- Staffing at Hillbrook and Child Welfare has stabilized

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- No better investment than training to professionalize and promote staff
- How often are trainings?
 - On an as needed basis
 - Hillbrook has a specific annual training schedule
 - Recent influx of new employees at Hillbrook and Child Welfare spiked trainings all at one time
- The county has invested in a lot of new positions this year; have they all been filled?
 - Currently have 6 vacancies in Child Welfare and 10 front line vacancies at Hillbrook

A motion was made by Mr. McCarron, seconded by Mr. Meaker, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

2. SPECIAL CHILDREN’S SERVICES: Jenny Dickinson, Director; Kathryn Anderson, Commissioner**a. INFORMATIONAL***Programs:*

Early Intervention
Preschool Special Education
Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs

Staffing:

Director- 1
Program Coordinators- 2
Education Specialists- 4
Transportation Coordinator- 1
Public Health Social Work Assistants- 17
Clerical- 3.5

Early Intervention:

- *SubPart 69-4 of New York State Regulations.*
- *Services children aged birth to 3 years with PT, OT, Speech and Special Instruction (generally)*
- *NYS sets rates*
- *OCHD approves services*
- *Provider contracts are with New York State*

Preschool Special Education:

- *Federal IDEA and Section 4410 New York State Education Law and Part 200 of NYS Regulations of the Commissioner of Education*
- *Services children aged 3 to 5 years with PT, OT, Speech, Special Instruction and other services deemed appropriate by the individual Committee’s for Preschool Special Education*
- *NYS sets rates for center-based programming, Onondaga County sets rates for related services*
- *School District chairs approve services*
- *Provider contracts are with Onondaga County*

Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs

- *NYS grant*
- *Services children aged birth to 21*
- *Individual case management, program creation, and community collaboration*

By the Numbers

In Onondaga County, the Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education programs combined employ approximately 270 providers (Speech, OT, PT, SI only)

The 4 year average of children enrolled in Early Intervention is 2,270 annually. The year to year fluctuation is nominal- less than 100 children on either side.

The 4 year average of children in Preschool Special Education is 2,877. The number of children has increased every year after a drop off during COVID, with the most recent completed school year at 3215 distinct kids.

The Early Intervention and Preschool wait lists are currently at their lowest points. In Early Intervention this is 346 overall compared to a high of 674. Preschool Special Education numbers are held at the district level.

97% of responding families report overall satisfaction with the Early Intervention program.

The expenses for EI have increased every year due to rate increases at the state (and the county?) level. The revenue the county receives back for EI services is approximately 75% of the total expenditures.

Year	2022		2023		2024	
EI - Total expenses	\$	4,114,448	\$	4,797,536	\$	5,324,986
Total Revenue	\$	3,193,684	\$	3,627,683	\$	3,691,566

The expenses for Preschool have increased every year as well. Not only have the numbers of kids increased each year, but NYSED has increased tuition rates, as well as related service rates and transportation costs have gone up as well. The County bills Medicaid for services for Medicaid eligible children. We also receive state aid on our expenses less Medicaid revenue @ 59.5%. In all, the county can expect to receive between 65 and 70% of services back in revenue.

School Year	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
Center Tuition	\$	21,336,765	\$	24,328,770	\$	26,606,981
Related Services	\$	6,466,087	\$	8,662,832	\$	8,768,504
SEIT	\$	1,110,816	\$	1,301,522	\$	1,338,256
Transportation	\$	7,022,975	\$	8,643,906	\$	9,642,575
Total Expenses	\$	35,936,644	\$	42,937,029	\$	46,356,316
Revenue (as of 11/17/25)	\$	25,911,273	\$	26,608,390	\$	26,378,720

- Early Intervention (EI) has the highest level of staffing
- EI and Preschool Education (PreK) look and feel like the same program to families
 - Provider can be the same for EI and PreK
 - Both programs are governed by federal and state law
- Anyone can refer a child for EI (physician, parent, grandparent, etc.)
- Once OCHD contacts the parent, staff members physically go to the home for intake and needs assessment
- A multi-disciplinary evaluation is done to see if the child qualifies for EI
- OCHD does not have PT, OT, and SLP's on staff; these are contracted services
- If child qualifies for the program, OCHD will create an individualized family service plan
 - Every 6 months OCHD ensures goals are met and that the child still meets qualifications to continue in the program
- After age 3, the child is transferred to the school district for the PreK Special Education program
- EI is a family centered service plan that focuses on the family as a whole and administered by OCHD
- PreK is a student centered service plan that focuses on the educational needs of the student and is administered through the school district

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

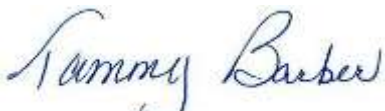
- Is this where the IEP is formed?
 - Yes, IEP is for the student; IFSP is for the family
- In the EI stage, are there any modifications made to the living environments to accommodate OT or PT?
 - OCHD works with the provider if adaptive equipment is needed
- There are different levels to OT/PT beyond hardcore equipment
- Many counties are not allowed to bring items into a home because they cannot be left in the home
- IFSP is good because it is family focused to meet the family where they are
 - Early Child Alliance has a small grant that allows providers to purchase a toy
 - The provider works with the child with the toy and can then leave it in the home
- When a child moves from IFSP to IEP, does it mean the IFSP is gone completely?
 - IFSP is for EI goals
 - IFSP goals can transfer to the IEP if the committee deems it appropriate for the child's education
- Services are provided at no cost to the families throughout the EI and PreK process

- The waitlist is biggest for Speech Therapy, how is it addressed?
 - Some things can be managed on a local level and some cannot (ie: rates)
 - Recognizing this is a national issue, OCHD has implemented innovative approaches to tackle the waitlist issue
 - Engage new providers with a focus on areas within the city that have longer waitlists
 - Prioritize the waitlist based on the needs of the children, whether it is multiple needs or severe needs
 - Currently use mapping technology to identify where individuals are located with the goal of increasing the number seen by providers
 - Review paperwork and processes to eliminate documentation not required by regulation, ultimately lessening offline work for providers
 - Difficult to determine how long families will be on the waitlist
 - 20% of waitlist is 6 months or more
- New York prides itself on being progressive and ahead of everything
- Many states have a job title that is just below a Speech Therapist that can help with the service issue
 - There is a state level coordinating council that makes recommendations
 - The council has a number of upcoming recommendations, including the creation of a new position
 - Recommendations will also focus on increasing engagement with pathway programs across NYS for speech therapy and other disciplines as well
- Is there a jump in numbers when a 3 or 4 year old gets into a PreK program?
 - Yes, there are a couple of situations
 - When the child is at home with no interaction, the preschool teachers will notice if intervention is needed
 - Some things develop and present in children as time goes on
- Does the county have any engagement once a child gets into the educational situation?
 - Mainly oversight through the end of PreK only
 - Focus is on children transitioning from EI to PreK
- If a family cannot get a provider to their home, the county will pay transportation costs to get them to a provider
- Has the transportation capacity issue been rectified?
 - No, but it is always a topic with the Transportation Coordinator
 - Able to handle the current capacity, but difficult to hire and retain drivers
- Does the parent go with the child or is there an aide to accompany?
 - Sometimes a facility visit is more appropriate than a home visit
 - Generally speaking, parents are not as engaged when children are receiving services from an agency
 - EI allows for parent transport with reimbursement or they can elect county transportation
- Children may learn skills effectively within a specific context and with specific providers but struggle to apply them in different environments such as the home
- The goal is for skills to translate across contexts, but due to high demand and workload in the field, need all hands on deck
- Is the rate increase still held up with CMS?
 - There are 2 increases:
 - 4% for the underserved has recently passed
 - 5% overall is still with CMS
- Does the rate modifier apply to certain areas?
 - The 4% approval preceded a clear designation of what is defined as underserved and is still in flux
- Is it fair to say that the numbers are low for Speech Pathologists?
 - Lower than the need
- Are Gebbie Services still available at Syracuse University?
 - Yes, for PreK

- The county only transports to programs, and Gebbie does not run programs or send providers into the field
- Transportation expenses can be reimbursed for EI and PreK
- Partnering with local institutions offers great opportunities; SU with Speech Therapy, Upstate and LeMoyne with Physical Therapy
- Services may be provided by qualified assistants or students working under the direct supervision and guidance of a licensed professional
- As a provider, the physical points of contact with kids is important to ensure they are in a safe environment
- What one thing would OCHD ask of the county to help with the program?
 - Encourage and advocate to the state for flexible options where care is not compromised and workforce increases in practical and innovative ways
- Can families get reimbursed for mileage?
 - Yes
- Can families use an Uber service?
 - Do not have reimbursement specifically for Uber
 - Currently working with Early Childhood Alliance for Lyft passes, but still in the development stage
- Is the bus company still Lampier's?
 - Yes, use Lampier's and Birnie
 - Alladin is used for services that are not offered within the county
 - Do not currently have any students receiving services outside the county

The meeting was adjourned at 1:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



TAMMY BARBER, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: **HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**

DATE: **NOVEMBER 19, 2025**

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Kathy Allen	DLHD
Jenny Dickson	OCHD
Steve Small	FinOps
Darcie Lesniak	Leg
Jason Dear	Finance
Amy Cunningham	DCFS
Joe Frakeschi	Legal Counsel
Ryan Ockenden	Law DEPT.
Ethan LaMontagne	Log.
Jim Beebe	Log.
John DeSantis	Log.