

Support Kids Today for a Healthy Westchester

Summary and Analysis

Prepared by



The budget cuts proposed by CE Rob Astorino and touted as cost savings for Westchester residents are a cruel shell game that harms children, youth and vulnerable families, and entails greater costs to taxpayers, either by failing to prevent future, more expensive problems, or by shifting to more expensive models of service.

These greater costs are borne by the same Westchester taxpayers who are presumably reaping the benefit of lower County property taxes made possible by these budget cuts.

How do you want your tax dollars invested?

\$2,400 per year to keep a child in licensed early care and education program so his parents can work and pay taxes	OR	Thousands of dollars in public benefits to support a parent who cannot work due to lack of child care
\$1,000 per year to help a family learn to cope with a youngster's emotional and behavioral problems	OR	\$1,000 per <i>day</i> for a youngster to be cared for in a psychiatric hospital
\$1,500 per year for services such as tutoring, mentoring, job readiness and leadership to help a teen stay in school and reach his/her potential	OR	Tens of thousands in lost economic productivity and possible costs of public assistance, criminal justice, etc. due to continuing the cycle of poverty.

Selected Child/Youth Items in the Proposed 2012 Operating Budget

CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES: Maintain parent share at 15%

- **The proposed budget** raises the parent share from 15% to 35%. For a family earning about \$36,000 a year, the increase amounts to \$7.67 *per day*, or \$ 2,800 per year. Thus, the total cost for that family is about \$4,900 per year (13.6% of their gross income).
- **Real cost of the cut:** Decades of research has shown that excluding poor children from high quality early childhood learning opportunities raises future costs to taxpayers of remedial education, school failure and lower economic productivity throughout their lifetimes. Without reliable child care, some parents may leave the workforce or even need to enroll in public assistance.

YOUTH PROGRAMS: Restore Invest-Kids-Fund to \$2.1 million

- **The proposed budget** reduces the Invest-in-Kids Fund from \$2.1 million adopted in the 2011 Budget to \$1.3 million. This fund supports dozens of programs—such as tutoring, mentoring, leadership, job readiness—for thousands of young people throughout the County.
- **Real cost of the cut:** Positive out-of-school time opportunities for young people increase school success, reduce juvenile crime, improve long-term economic productivity, thus reducing societal costs. Incarcerating one teenager costs about \$240,000 per year. Prevention costs just a tiny fraction of this amount, and helps youth and communities thrive.

HEALTH: Restore \$1.9 million for Neighborhood Health Centers

- **The proposed budget** eliminates funding of \$1.9 million for three Neighborhood Health Centers, which provide medical care for thousands of low-income residents in communities from Peekskill to Mt. Vernon. Also entails loss of about \$700,000 in State matching funds.
- **Real cost of the cut:** The CE's budget message suggests that Health Centers don't need the funding, and that anyone who is not insured should apply to Medicaid and/or will not be turned away at a hospital. This approach is the epitome of "pennywise and pound-foolish."
 - Any patient who currently comes to a health center and is eligible for Medicaid or Child Health Plus is immediately enrolled.
 - Caring for patients, especially those with chronic illness, in a "medical home" is much less expensive than episodic, emergency care in a hospital. It also provides economic benefits of preventing acute illness and allowing patients to continue working, etc.
 - Taxpayers are legally "on the hook" for caring for the uninsured one way or another. Hospitals are the most expensive way to provide this care.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SOCIAL/BEHAVIORAL HEALTH: Restore (\$592,000) for Early Step Forward

- **The proposed budget** reduces 70% of funding (about \$400,000 in reduction) for Early Step Forward, an innovative and effective program that helps young children, parents and child care staff understand and cope with difficult emotions and behaviors. Serves over 1,000 young children, their parents and caregivers each year.
- **Real cost of the cut:** Since the inception of this program in 2006, even the most challenging children have been able to remain in the participating early childhood programs, thus better preparing them to function well in school and beyond. Without these services, taxpayers will pay more for special education or behavioral interventions. Also, the agencies the program has been able to serve *more children each year* by teaching child care staff to sustain the program and by leveraging private philanthropy.

OTHER CONCERNS:

- The CE's budget calls for reductions of County workforce, including 71 positions in the Department of Social Services. Will this reduction, or have previous reductions, compromised the safety of children? For example, is the County still committed to the workload standards recommended in the CWLA audit of several years ago?
- Only \$14 million will be saved by County workforce reductions. Of the other \$69 million to be saved by "across-the-board cuts in County departments," how much of this will be reductions of services through cuts to contracts with non-profits?