

Department for Children, Youth and Families

Amend the 2022 budget to accept funding from the Office of Children and Family Services for a Family Peer Advocate to be member of the Mobile Response Team

The Department respectfully requests Legislative authorization to amend the 2022 budget to accept funding from the Office of Children and Family Services for a Family Peer Advocate for Family First Mobile Response van in the amount of \$120,000. The Department will be issuing an RFP for the Family Peer Advocate services.

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has identified mobile response units as a strategy to develop and operate coordinated programs of community-based family support and family preservation services. These services are intended to prevent child maltreatment among families at risk, assure children's safety within the home, and preserve integrity of the family unit in which children have been maltreated, when the family's needs can be safely addressed effectively in the home. OCFS has identified to build and effective and responsive team for the mobile response vans, Family Peer Advocates (FPAs) have been identified as integral members of the mobile response teams.

OCFS has leveraged Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) for funding. CAPTA funds are geared towards support and improvement of state child protective services (CPS) systems. Applicable areas identified for the use of these funds include case management and delivery of services provided to children and families, and developing and enhancing the capacity of community-based programs to integrate shared leadership strategies between parents and professionals to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect at the neighborhood level. It is within this space that the inclusion of FPAs bridges the work of child welfare professionals and parental representation, advocacy, and efficacy.

The value FPAs will bring to the mobile response teams has been recognized by OCFS. FPAs are trained and credentialed individuals with lived experience navigating specific systems. FPAs assist parents coping with crises such as a child protective services (CPS) investigations or family separation by providing empathic understanding from individuals who have faced similar circumstances. FPAs can mentor and cultivate a parent's confidence in system literacy, understanding of parental rights, service navigation, and advocacy to local departments of social services (LDSSs), provider agencies, the court system and other system actors. The supportive and trusting relationship between a parent and their advocate can help educate the parent to navigate the system and access the tools they need to hold self-determination for their families throughout the process.