

Res No. 580

Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass A.6334-A/S. 6877-A, which would create the Office of the Child Advocate to oversee the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

By Council Members James, Mealy, Sears, Foster, Gerson, Liu, Mendez, Palma, Stewart and Jackson

Whereas, Recent reports regarding the abusive and discriminatory conditions of juvenile justice facilities run by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (“OCFS”) indicate the need for urgent reform of current OCFS policies and practices; and

Whereas, The need for additional oversight of the state child welfare system is further demonstrated by the tragic deaths of children such as Colesvinton Florestal, Jr. and Nixzmary Brown, whose families were known to the child welfare authorities prior to their deaths; and

Whereas, Bill A.6334-A/S. 6877-A would establish an independent Office of the Child Advocate; and

Whereas, The Office of the Child Advocate would replace the Commission on the Quality of Foster Care, which currently performs a similar but significantly limited oversight role; and

Whereas, The Child Advocate would be charged with (i) evaluating the performance of OCFS, (ii) reviewing, referring, and investigating complaints against OCFS, (iii) reviewing the institutions and residences into which foster children are placed, and (iv) recommending and overseeing the implementation of necessary corrective action plans and policy changes; and

Whereas, The Child Advocate would have the authority to initiate civil action on behalf of a child against the State and other public or private entities providing out-of-home residential services to children; and

Whereas, Children and families that experience foster care removals often experience extreme disruption and emotional trauma and the Child Advocate would serve as a means by which both parents and children involved with the child welfare system could report abuses experienced while in the system; and

Whereas, The Child Advocate would operate a private toll-free hotline for children in need; and

Whereas, Similar advocacy offices exist in the nearby states of Connecticut, New Jersey, and Rhode Island; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York State Legislature to pass A.6334-A/S. 6877-A, which would create the Office of the Child Advocate to oversee the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.