

# Foster Care System in New York: Need vs Funding

## ABSTRACT

The number of children that are placed in the foster care system in the United States is rising every year. This places a significant burden on the Child Protective Services (CPS) agencies in every state that are already underfunded and overburdened. Evidence-based social work has proven that certain practices can be employed to improve the foster care system and significantly accelerate the process of achieving permanency for foster children. However, employing such practices requires additional funding from the state and federal governments. This is an exploratory study that seeks to understand the needs of CPS agencies in counties in the state of New York and assess if they are being funded fairly and adequately.

## KEYWORDS

New York Foster Care System, Child Protective Services

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Child abuse and neglect are severe issues that every state in the United States continues to battle with. In September 2016, there were 437,465 children in the foster care system in United States. This is a significant rise from 396,966 children that were in the foster care system in September 2012 [11]. This number is expected to keep rising unless proper measures are taken towards finding permanency for these children [11]. Majority of the children who are removed from their homes and placed in the foster care system are victims of abuse and neglect and lack an adequate emotional support system that is imperative for their personal growth and well-being [5]. Children who undergo multiple moves in the foster care system have been found to develop emotional and behavioral problems, struggle academically and find it difficult to develop any meaningful relationships with foster parents or other caretakers [5]. Therefore, it is paramount to ensure that these children spend as little time in the foster care system as possible and that immediate efforts are made to achieve permanency. Conditions that breed child abuse are often coupled with an array of contributing sociological factors such as the socio-economic well-being of the family, history of mental illness, alcohol, drugs or other substance abuse problems [2]. These contributing factors make the issue of child abuse and neglect incredibly hard to proactively understand and tackle and

Child Protective Services (CPS) agencies across the United States must play catch up to minimize the physical and mental agony that these children suffer. What makes matters worse is that CPS agencies in almost every state are overburdened and underfunded [7]. Child abuse and neglect is a delicate issue for which there cannot be a singular overarching solution that would meet the needs of all vulnerable children. Social work is very contextual and the case workers who respond to cases of neglect and abuse need to understand the context of the case at hand, interview several individuals such as the parents, neighbors and teachers and then make an intelligent judgment on whether to remove the child from their home. Underfunded CPS agencies lead to caseworkers that are offered low salaries, lack supervisory support, have high caseloads, administrative burdens and low levels of training [7]. These factors correlate to caseworker turnover which is directly associated with placement instability for children in foster homes [7]. In contrast, factors that promote placement stability for children in foster homes include providing subsidies for adoption and guardianship placements and using caseworkers with graduate level training [7]; both of which require the adequate funding of CPS agencies.

Table 1: Children in Foster Care [11]

Fiscal Year (FY)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
In foster care	396,966	400,911	414,435	427,444	437,465
Entered foster care	251,352	254,719	264,364	268,720	273,539
Exited foster care	239,496	238,892	236,906	243,043	250,248
Waiting to be adopted	101,945	104,395	108,068	111,358	117,794
Adopted	52,025	50,820	50,671	53,556	57,208

To ensure the proper allocation of available funds to CPS agencies, it is first important understand which communities of people, if any, are more susceptible to experience family instability. There is evidence to show that socio-economic status of a family affects the stability, including parenting practices and developmental outcomes for children [15]. Poverty has been shown to be a reliable predictor of child abuse and neglect and low-income families with a history of substance abuse exhibit the highest rates of child abuse and neglect [12]. Lower socio-economic status also leads to domestic crowding, that is, more families living closer together. This leads to increased physical contact, lack of privacy, sleep deprivation, and poor hygiene conditions [9]. Domestic crowding has a negative impact on adults, and especially children who experience psychological stress and poor health outcomes [10]. In the United States, low socio-economic status and domestic crowding are characteristic features of urban and metropolitan areas [9]. It would be interesting to see if the state and federal governments take this into consideration while allocating funds to different counties in the state. To accomplish this, I look at the foster care system in the state of New York and assess the needs of the CPS agencies in each county based on the number of children that they serve. I also

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look at the funding that each county received during the fiscal year; both from the state and federal governments.

## 2 DATA

For this study, I look at three different datasets that were obtained from Kaggle [4], a data platform that offers and maintains thousands of datasets.

- (1) New York State: Children in Foster Care annually — This dataset consists of annual indicators for the foster care system in each county for each year from 1994 to 2017. There are two types of indicators — Days of Care and Number of Children. *Days of Care* variables refer to the number of days a child spent in an adoptive home, agency operated boarding home, approved relative home, foster boarding home or group home. *Number of Children* variables refer to total number of children admitted each year, number of discharges, number of children served, and the number of children served. For this study, I specifically look at total number of days spent in foster care as well as the number of children served by each county to assess the needs of each county.
- (2) New York State: Income by County — I look at the median household income for each county to assess the socio-economic well-being of that county. As the literature suggests, a lower socio-economic status correlates with high family instability [15]. I wanted to see if counties with a lower socio-economic status received more funds from the state and federal governments as compared to counties with a higher socio-economic status.
- (3) New York State: Child Welfare and Community Services Programs — This dataset consists of the CPS and domestic violence prevention agencies in each county that received state or federal funds for effectively employing one of the following programs.
  - (a) *Children and Family Trust Fund*: supports employment of evidence-based parenting programs.
  - (b) *CPS and Domestic violence Collaboration Projects*: supports programs that show effective collaboration between CPS agencies and domestic violence prevention agencies.
  - (c) *Healthy Families NY Home Visiting Program*: supports programs that employ services focusing on parenting practices, prenatal care and child health development.
  - (d) *Kinship*: supports programs that employ services to assist kinship caregivers by providing counseling, peer support, financial assistance and training on parenting skills.
  - (e) *Multidisciplinary Teams and Child Advocacy Centers*: programs that collaborate well with other agencies and provide multidisciplinary response teams in cases of child abuse and domestic violence.
  - (f) *Public Private Partnership Pilot Program*: supports programs that recognize and help at risk children and youth to prevent any future engagement with child protective services or the juvenile justice system.
  - (g) *TANF Prevention and Post Adoption Programs*: supports programs designed to aid families under 200 percent of poverty level and at high risk of foster care placements.

It is important to note that most CPS agencies are significantly overburdened and underfunded [7] and do not have the resources available to employ most of the programs mentioned above, thereby, making them ineligible to receive these funds.

## 3 DATA ANALYSIS

### 3.1 Number of Children in Foster Care

For my data analysis, I only looked at the fiscal year of 2017 and began by looking at how many children each county served in 2017. Figure 1 depicts a stark contrast in the number of children served by the five boroughs of New York city versus the rest of the state. Table 1 depicts the number of children in foster care served by New York City county and the next four counties.

**Table 2: Number of Children in Foster Care**

County	Number of Children Served
New York City	15266
Erie	1509
Suffolk	912
Monroe	731
Westchester	606

State of New York has five counties that co-extend to the five borough's of New York City as depicted in Table 3. The dataset *State of New York: Children in Foster Care annually* treats the five boroughs cumulatively as New York City county. This is a limitation because we do not have the foster care data available for each borough. However, since the boroughs of Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens have a much lower per-capita income and median family income as compared to Manhattan and Staten Island, we know that the former belong to a much lower socio-economic class. From the literature review, we know that lower socio-economic status of a family directly corresponds to family instability which can further lead to child abuse and neglect [15]. Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens also have a higher population and a higher number of households than Manhattan and Staten Island [3], and therefore, are more susceptible to domestic crowding; another indicator of plausible child abuse and neglect [9].

**Table 3: New York boroughs: Population and Income**

Borough	County	Population	Per capita income	Median family income
Manhattan	New York	1,643,734	111,386	75,629
Brooklyn	Kings	2,629,150	23,605	48,777
Queens	Queens	2,333,054	25,553	62,459
The Bronx	Bronx	1,455,720	17,575	38,431
Staten Island	Richmond	476,015	30,843	83,264

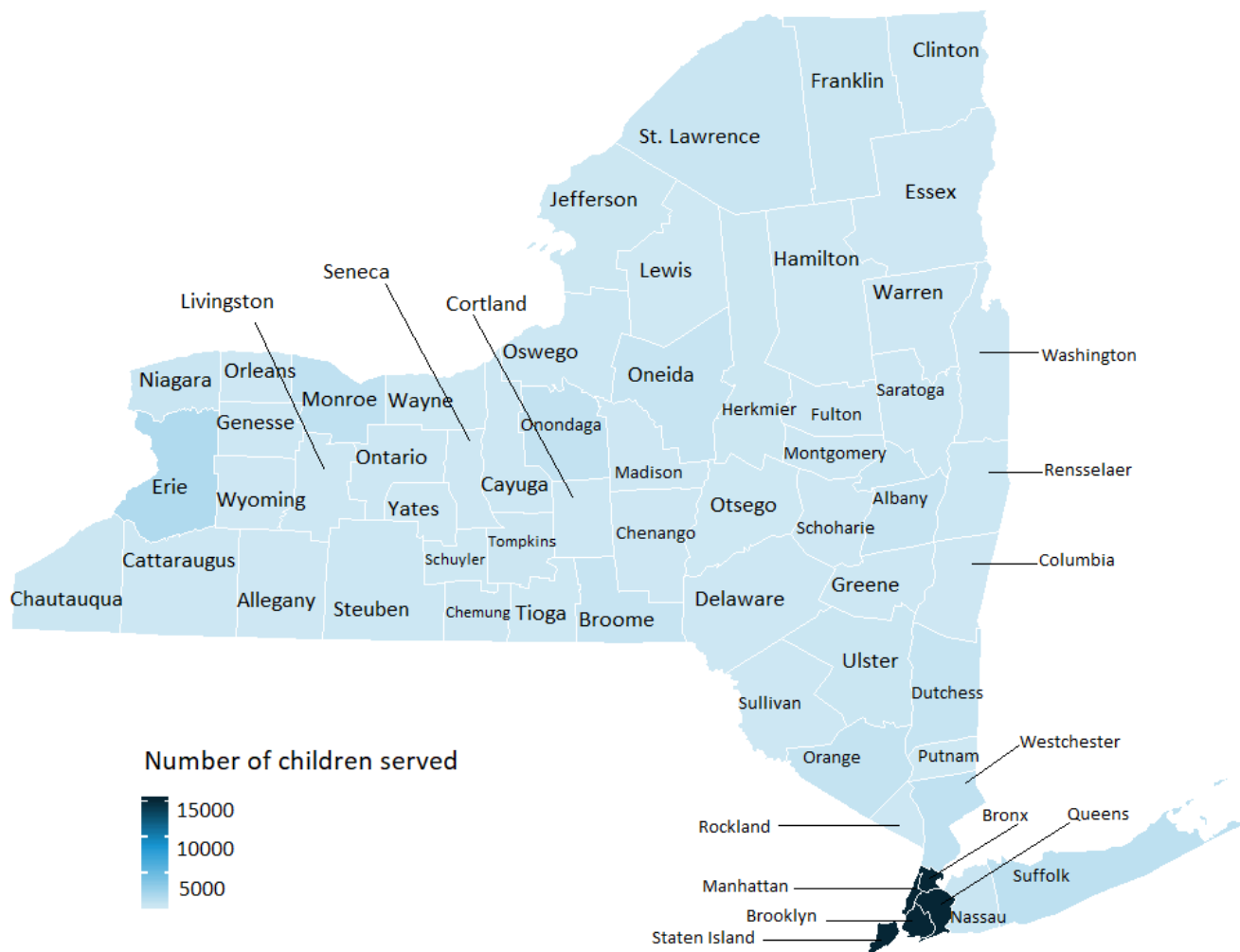


Figure 1: Number of children in Foster Care in the State of New York

### 3.2 Median Family Income

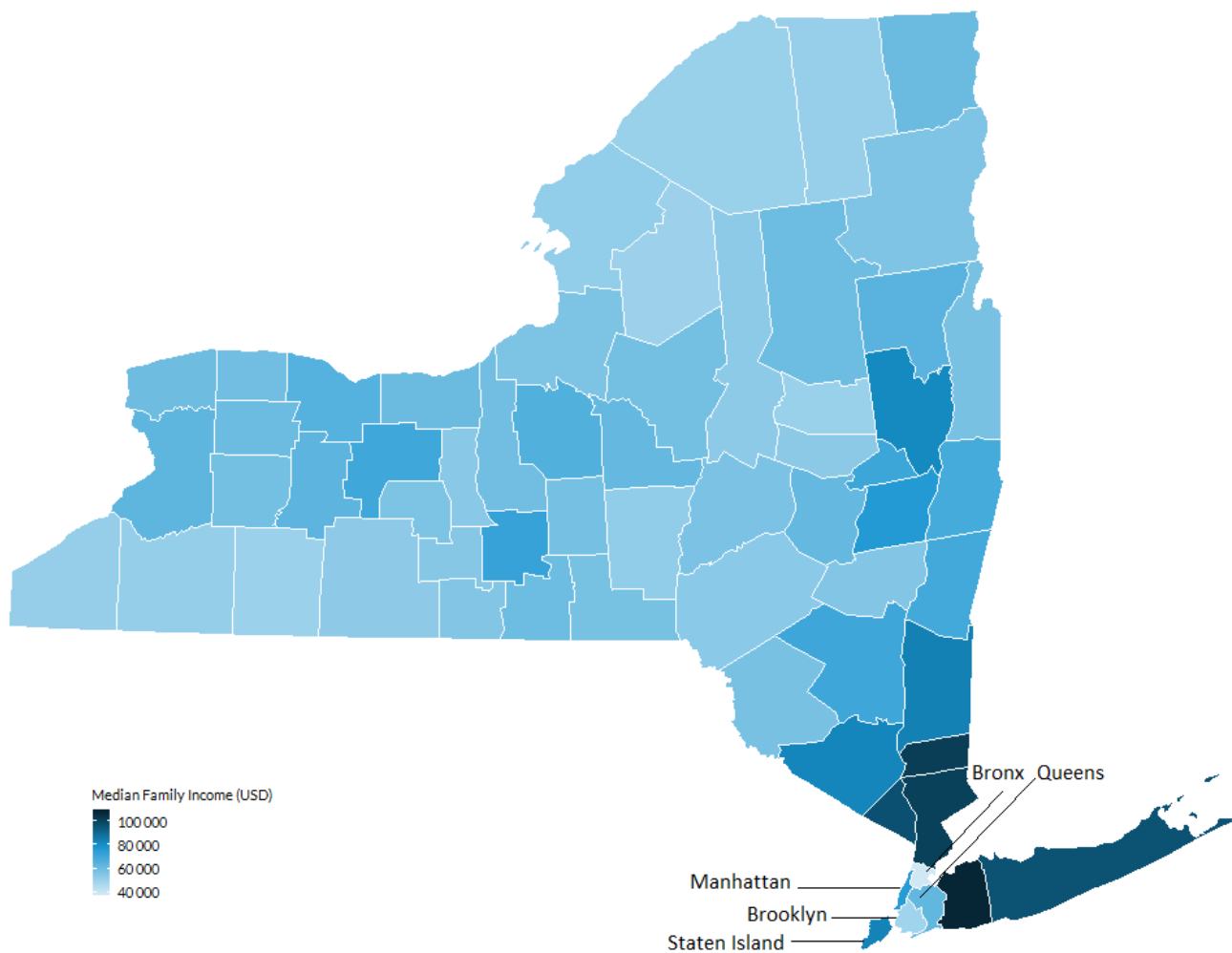
The socio-economic well-being of a family is a good indicator of family stability and the possibility of child abuse and neglect [15]. Therefore, I look at the median family income for each county in the state of New York. Figure 2 depicts a visualization of the Median Family Income. Table 3 details the median family income for each of the five boroughs of New York city. We see that the median family income in Staten Island (\$83,264) is almost twice as much as the median family income in the Bronx (\$38,431) and Brooklyn (\$48,777). The median family income for Manhattan is \$75,629 which is still significantly higher than the median family income in the Bronx, Brooklyn or Queens. It is important to note that Manhattan has the highest per capita income (\$111,386) in the State of New York. From Figure 2, it is also evident that counties surrounding New York City such as Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk are affluent counties with median family income greater than \$100,000.

### 3.3 Total funds received by each county

After considering the number of children in foster care in each county in the state of New York and the median family income for each county, I now look into the *New York State: Child Welfare and Community Services Programs* dataset to see which counties received the most amount and number of funds from both state and local governments. Table 4 depicts the counties that received the most number of funds from both the state and federal governments and the total sum of the funds received.

## 4 DISCUSSION

Table 4 depicts the total amount and number of funds received by each county. It is imperative to remember that these funds are highly competitive and the CPS agencies in each county must apply for their funds with evidence showing that they are employing certain programs as specified in section 2. We see that Brooklyn received the highest sum total of funds (\$4,798,007) whereas Manhattan won



**Figure 2: Median Family Income by County in the State of New York**

the most number of funds (26) and received the second highest sum total of funds (\$4,527,717). I especially use the term "won" to reemphasize the fact that these funds are highly competitive. Looking back at Table 1, we know that New York City counties were serving 15,266 children in the foster care system followed by Erie county which had 1509 children in the foster care system. It makes sense to allocate a high sum of funds to New York City counties to be able to help the most number of children in foster care. What is interesting is that Bronx and Queens, two boroughs with a lower socio-economic status and higher number of households received much less funding than Manhattan. Queens is all the way at the bottom of Table 4 and only received \$1,133,081.

Another interesting finding was the massive discrepancy in the total amount of funds received by some counties versus the number of children in foster care in those counties. Table 4 shows that Schenectady county received a total of \$2,092,743 and won 7 funds. However, Schenectady county only had 354 in foster care in 2017.

Similarly, Westchester county and Dutchess county received significant amount of funds during the fiscal year but only had 606 and 431 children in the foster care system respectively.<sup>v</sup> It is also important to note that Westchester county and Dutchess county are among the most affluent counties in the state of New York with a median family income of \$100,863 and \$83,599 respectively. Another such example is Orange county which has one of the highest median family income in the state (\$82,480). Orange county only had 572 children in foster care during the fiscal year but received the same amount of funds as Queens which has a significantly higher number of children in foster care and is also a county belonging to a lower socio-economic class.

From our literature review we know that CPS agencies in low-income neighborhoods and metropolitan areas are handling a significantly higher number of cases and require more funding from the state and federal governments. We see some evidence of that with the funding received by Brooklyn but it is surprising that

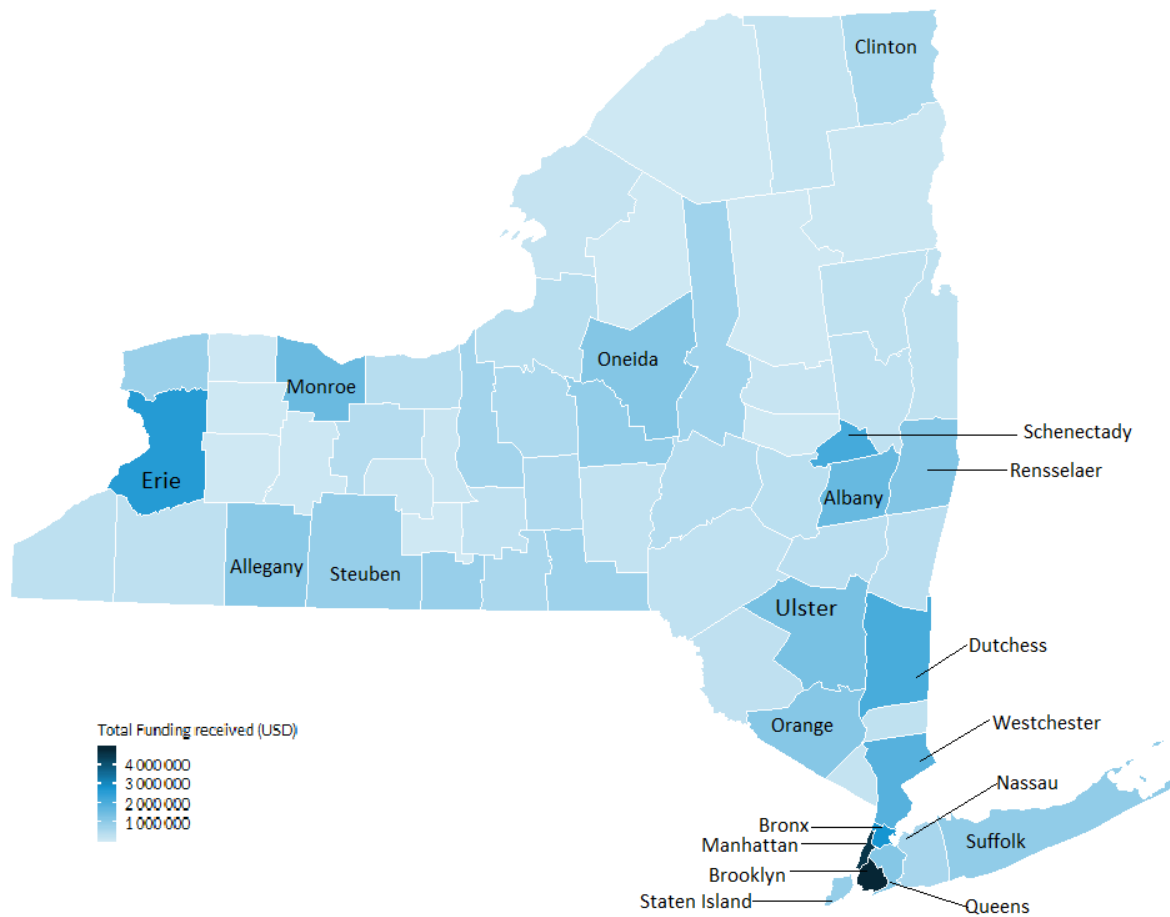


Figure 3: Median Family Income by County in the State of New York

Table 4: Funds received by each County in the State of New York

County	Total Sum of funds received (USD)	Total Number of funds received
Brooklyn	4,798,007	15
Manhattan	4,527,717	26
Bronx	2,767,598	8
Erie	2,601,468	10
Schenectady	2,092,743	7
Dutchess	2,045,491	8
Westchester	1,855,803	13
Albany	1,594,280	5
Monroe	1,548,095	7
Ulster	1,315,301	3
Rensselaer	1,181,772	4
Oneida	1,152,293	4
Queens	1,133,081	5

counties like Westchester where there are only about 700 children in foster care receive more funding than Queens and Eric.

## 5 IMPLICATIONS

In the state of New York, Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) is responsible for funding services ranging from primary prevention to post adoption [1]. OCFS prioritizes investing in programs that have exhibited improved safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families. Programs are selected from a competitive list and are supported for five years [1]. This raises several concerns because counties with a higher socio-economic status have had the funds available to be able to invest in evidence-based and evidence-informed services and improve their foster care systems. At this point, it is important to remember that CPS agencies in most counties are underfunded and overburdened [7] and are struggling to hire enough social-workers to manage the caseloads. They do not have the resources to invest in newer evidence-based programs. This puts the CPS agencies in counties with a lower socio-economic status at a significant disadvantage. From the data analysis we also saw that the CPS agencies in affluent counties such as Westchester, Nassau, Suffolk are serving a significantly fewer

number of children as compared to CPS agencies in metropolitan counties such as New York City and Buffalo. This creates a vicious cycle where can never effectively compete to receive more funds from the state and federal governments.

In the United States, while working with data with geographical underpinnings, it is important to remember that the society is racially segregated with African-American and Hispanic communities living in metropolitan areas whereas majority of Caucasian communities reside in sub-urban neighborhoods [13]. Racial and ethnic minorities living in metropolitan areas are also of lower socio-economic status [13]. This implies that any funding decisions made by the state and federal on whether to fund social services in a metropolitan county has a direct impact on racial minorities that have systematically been discriminated against in the past [6]. It is imperative to understand the historical context of the available data and not make reverse or inconsistent arguments. A person could easily look at the foster care data and make the following argument — *"African-American and Hispanic families inhabit metropolitan areas and metropolitan foster care systems have the most children placed in them. Therefore, it must be a cultural and ethnic issue where racial minorities are not employing the best parenting practices"*. Arguments like these undermine the complexity of the situation and refuse to acknowledge that racial minorities have ended up being clustered together in low-income neighborhoods because they have been denied opportunities for economic growth [8].

From the funding data we saw that New York county (Manhattan) has the highest socio-economic status in the state of New York based on the per-capita income. However, the per-capita income can be very misleading because there are 82 billionaires residing in Manhattan [14]. These outliers can significantly affect the per-capita income and make the whole county appear more affluent in general. A better measure to assess the socio-economic status is the median family income especially because we want to look at families and their financial stability to understand the risk of their possible interaction with the foster care system.

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