



July 20, 2020

Dear Members of the New York State Congressional Delegation:

The COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a terrific blow to families and communities in New York and the systems that provide essential health and human services. Even as the State begins to recover, it is clear that those already facing challenges of poverty, disability, ill-health, racial discrimination, and poor mental health were ravaged by this illness. These same families have also been more sharply impacted by school closures, layoffs, supply shortages, social distancing, and other fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The undersigned New York State-based child advocacy organizations urge our US Senators and Members of the House of Representatives to stand firmly with children and families during negotiations on the next federal stimulus package. In an April survey of New York families with babies and toddlers, more than one-third of parents reported having skipped or reduced the size of their meals due to financial insecurity and 11% reported having skipped or reduced the size of meals for their children. Nearly 60% worried they would be unable to cover basic expenses like rent, health care, or food, if the crisis continued. The headline of data recently released by the U.S. Census Bureau is that families with children across the United States are being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic recession. 11.8 million U.S. children live in households that missed a mortgage or rent payment or sought a deferment, while roughly 3.9 million children are experiencing COVID-19 induced food [shortages](#). New York entered the pandemic with shamefully high numbers of children experiencing poverty. New York children were more likely to live in poverty than in [31 other states, with 19% experiencing poverty in 2019](#). Due to structural and systemic racism, child poverty among New York children of color

has long exceeded 30%. Without intentional government interventions at every level, New York's child poverty levels are in danger of exploding.

The plain truth is that this crisis abruptly ruptured the often tenuous yet interconnected systems on which poor families rely. Parents cannot go back to work without child care. Child care providers cannot operate if they do not have access to food, personal protective equipment, and enough money to cover expenses. Families without employment are losing their health insurance and children are missing essential immunizations and screenings while health care providers are at risk of insolvency.

New York cannot rebuild alone. It will need extraordinary support from the federal government for state and local governments to pull out of crisis and into recovery, funds that are essential to prevent New York State from having to slash social services, education, child care, child welfare, and other family and child-serving programs.

As organizations dedicated to improving the lives of New Yorkers, particularly children living in poverty and in marginalized communities, we have analyzed what will be needed to support families with young children and keep many of them from slipping into intractable poverty. We request that these provisions be included in the next stimulus package to help New York's children and families.

Health

- Increase Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) payments to state Medicaid programs by a total of 14 percentage points.
- Retain the Medicaid Maintenance of Effort (MOE) and make it effective over the course of the recession rather than the duration of the public health emergency. Eliminating the MOE would allow states to reduce benefits and eligibility, possibly leading to New Yorkers being denied benefits or removed from coverage during a public health crisis.
- Link FMAP increases to State unemployment rates and include the Medicaid expansion population in FMAP increases.
- Provide full premium subsidies to allow workers to maintain their employer-sponsored coverage if they are eligible for COBRA due to a layoff or reduction in hours, and for workers who have been furloughed but are still active in their employer-sponsored plan.
- Invest \$38.5 billion for providers of mental health and addiction treatment services, ensuring no less than 25% is dedicated to children's services and infrastructure, to help address long-term trauma caused by anxiety, isolation, loss of loved ones, and severe economic hardship.

Child Care

- Include at least \$50 billion for child care to enable providers to continue operating, or to reopen, at reduced capacity to allow for social distancing; to provide essential workers quality, safe, free, or low-cost child care; and to ensure that child care is available to other workers as states begin to reopen.¹

¹ It is estimated that it will cost [\\$9.6 billion](#) in public funding each month to sustain the fragile child care industry, and ensure that parents can access safe, affordable child care during the recovery.

- Make the child and dependent care tax credit (CDCTC) fully refundable for 2020 and the near future and increase the maximum credit to 50% of allowable costs. This would expand eligibility (raising phase-out threshold from \$15,000 to \$120,000), and double the amount of child and dependent care expenses that are eligible for the credit to \$6,000 for one qualifying individual and \$12,000 for two or more qualifying individuals to better reflect the true cost of providing safe, quality child care.

Education

- Include \$345 billion for an education stabilization fund.
- Protect current funding for education by establishing a maintenance of effort provision preventing localities and states from cutting education for three years.
- Dedicate at least \$12 billion to children disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including children of color, children in immigrant families, and children in juvenile justice facilities.²

Early Childhood

- Allow virtual visits to be considered home visits at least through the end of the calendar year to safely preserve valuable relationships without being penalized.
- Maintain all funding for and staffing levels of Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) programs regardless of potential temporary reductions in enrollment to preserve the existing home visiting infrastructure.
- Add flexible funding for extended learning time through summer programs, extending the school year, and/or extending or restructuring the school day in order to address learning loss - with priority for students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and student experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or involved with the juvenile justice system.
- Invest in technology equity: With significant uncertainty about how long the pandemic will last and whether additional school closures may be required in the fall or at some other point in the future, emergency preparedness in this new era must include ensuring equitable distance learning capacity

Economic Security

- Continue pandemic unemployment insurance programs until economic conditions stabilize, rather than according to a set date.
- Establish an emergency assistance fund of at least \$10 billion to families with children, including children being cared for by kin, through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to address the unmet needs of families and individuals with the lowest incomes as set forth in the Pandemic TANF Assistance Act.³ Make the emergency assistance funds available to families and individuals that have been left out of other relief measures, including immigrants, individuals returning from jail or prison, survivors of domestic violence, and young people from low-income neighborhoods just entering the labor market, among others.

² Senators Schumer and Murray recently introduced a comprehensive bill - the [Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act \(CCCERA\)](#) to ensure children have access to safe, quality education, child care and child welfare supports during the pandemic, and the recovery.

³ See [Pandemic TANF Assistance Act](#) (S. 3672), introduced by Sen. Ron Wyden (OR).

- Retroactively establish equity in the Economic Impact (or stimulus) payments paid out under the CARES Act to ensure all children and young adults receive the same rebate as adults (i.e., \$1,200, rather than \$500). A single parent with two children should not receive a smaller rebate (\$2,200) than a married couple without children (\$2,400).
- Authorize additional, substantial, and regularly distributed “stimulus” payments (at least \$2,000 per month) that will reach those who need it most.
- Adopt procedures so that Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients with dependents can easily obtain their recovery rebates automatically without filing additional information just as SSI recipients without dependents will.
- Strengthen the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)
 - Make the CTC fully refundable for 2020 and the near future and increase the maximum to \$3,000 per child (\$3,600 for a child under age 6). Make 17-year-olds qualifying children.
 - Expand the eligibility and amount of the EITC for taxpayers with no qualifying children for 2020 and the near future by expanding to cover previously excluded young childless adults, aged 19 to 25 (except for full-time students) and increasing the upper age limit to age 66. The maximum credit amount in 2020 would increase from \$538 to \$1,487.
 - Pay out these credits on a periodic basis to help families meet monthly bills, rather than a lump sum at tax time.
- Authorize \$11.5 billion in Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) to strengthen eviction prevention services and to prevent a surge in homelessness.

Child Welfare

- Increase funding to CAPTA Title II Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) grants by \$1 billion to increase preventive services in the communities hardest hit by the pandemic.
- Increase Title IV-E Chafee funding by \$500 million to allow states additional funds to support older youth in care and transitioning out of care, especially to implement moratoriums on aging out of care.⁴
- Increase funding to Title IV-B, Part 2, the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF) by \$1 billion, and to CAPTA Title I by \$500 million, to help eliminate the need for out-of-home placements.
- Ensure the FMAP rate increase is provided to the Title IV-E Prevention Program, the principal source of funding for child welfare prevention services, critical to keeping families safely together.⁵
- Increase funding to kinship navigator programs by \$20 million to support relatives and family friends caring for children who cannot remain safely with their parents during this crisis.

⁴ Senators Brown, Harris, Casey, and Cortez Masto recently introduced the [Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act](#) (S. 4172) to provide a much-needed infusion of emergency resources to help the child welfare system adequately respond to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁵ The Title IV-E Prevention Program is not currently reimbursed at the FMAP rate, but instead is reimbursed at a 50% rate.

Hunger and Food Insecurity

- Provide \$10 billion to support anticipated increases in participation and to cover program cost increases related to flexibilities provided to SNAP by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.
- Boost SNAP maximum benefit by 15%.
- Increase the minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30.
- Suspend all SNAP administrative rules that would terminate or weaken benefits.

New York children – together with children across the country - are being hit hard by food insecurity, learning loss, and myriad family disruptions; without supportive services, many will suffer negative consequences of these traumatic experiences for years to come. We urge you to prioritize children as you make decisions about mitigating the harm of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We stand ready to discuss these issues with you. As always, thank you for your commitment to New York's children.

Sincerely,

Kate Breslin, President and CEO, **Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy**

Timothy Hathaway, Executive Director, **Prevent Child Abuse New York**

Allison Lake, Executive Director, **Westchester Children's Association**

Jennifer March, Executive Director, **Citizens' Committee for Children**

Larry Marx, CEO, **The Children's Agenda**

Naomi Post, Executive Director, **Children's Defense Fund-New York**