

February 28, 2023

Honorable Andrew Stewart-Cousins, President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building, Room 907
Albany, New York 12247

Honorable Carl Heastie, Speaker of the Assembly
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building, Room 932
Albany, New York 12248

Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

RE: The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund in the FY 2023-24 Budget

Dear Governor Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Heastie,

We are 58 organizations and individuals from across New York State representing parents and youth who have been harmed by the current investigative and prosecutorial approach to child welfare; and advocates, legal agencies, community groups, service providers and organizations working to enhance the quality of life of parents, youth, families and communities impacted by the debilitating effects of poverty that primarily drives child welfare/child protective services (“CPS”) system involvement.

We urge you to include the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund, currently included in the Child and Family Reinvestment Act advanced by Assemblymember Hevesi and Senator Brisport **in the FY 2023-24 Budget**. The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund advances the health and development of all New York’s children by investing resources in communities that have been historically disenfranchised and targeted for government intervention through the CPS system. The Fund will resource community-driven initiatives and projects that strengthen families to reduce contact with CPS. This is the time for bold new investments in our families.

The Fund will act as a counterpoint to the CPS system which disproportionately monitors, investigates, prosecutes, and separates Black, Latinx, and Indigenous families as compared to white, affluent families and families of other races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status. The majority of reports to our state child abuse hotline are not about abuse, but about poverty-related

conditions framed as neglect, including housing instability and homelessness, lack of transportation to school, inability to obtain medical care, lack of food, childcare, and other basic needs. Instead of offering help with these basic necessities, CPS often responds to Black, Latinx, and Indigenous families by removing their children and prosecuting parents in family court, causing monumental disruption to the families' structure and everyday lives. These drastic and unhelpful interventions lead to distrust of community helpers such as child care providers, schools and hospitals who are required by state law to be "mandated reporters." In turn, these ruptured relationships negatively impact children's future health and wellbeing outcomes and result in immeasurable trauma and further social and financial disadvantage to our most vulnerable neighbors. This fund will promote child wellbeing by meeting families' material, mental, and emotional needs by funding community-based groups that families trust and that are responsive to the particular needs and desires of the children and families they serve.

The primary focus of the CPS or child welfare system is on investigation and family court prosecution. The system is not currently designed nor equipped to provide basic necessities or to nurture children and families' environmental conditions. Yet we spend billions of dollars to investigate families and maintain children in congregate facilities and with foster parents while grassroots organizations whose sole purpose is to help children and families stay together safely and thrive are chronically underfunded. In many neighborhoods targeted by CPS, there are groups that provide concrete resources, foster social connections, and help families in times of crisis but they struggle to survive and are locked out of access to state dollars due to unattainable criteria and unduly complicated processes.

The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund would strengthen and multiply community assets by investing in local projects and organizations through a community-led grant-making process. State dollars will flow to groups that are deeply embedded in communities and responsive to the needs and desires of disadvantaged children and families and will operate through local advisory committees that will determine the kinds of investments they want in their neighborhoods. The Fund would:

- Support capacity and sustainability of local nonprofits by investing in small groups that usually don't have the capacity to apply for government funding. *Only groups with budgets under \$2 million that are recommended by community members.*
- Resource trusted organizations. *This fund is only open to groups without ties to the CPS system.*
- Center community expertise in budget decisions. *Advisory boards include child welfare system-impacted parents and youth.*
- Intentionally invest in the social fabric. *It uses the Asset-Based Community Development model to build social capital and collective action.*
- Build long-term community capacity. *Technical assistance to support growth is*

written in.

- Reduce the likelihood of family involvement in the child protective system. *It invests in projects and resources known to strengthen healthy family functioning and decrease vulnerability to CPS intervention.*
- Bring joy. *It supports family activities, community gatherings and neighborly care.*

Moreover, the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund will save money long term. Investing in neighborhoods can reduce health disparities, improve educational outcomes and reduce the well-documented unnecessary and harmful policing of Black and Latinx children and families.

The Fund is also a critical step forward toward unleashing the creative, joyful, and productive potential of all New York State's children.

Signed,

Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York
Bridges From Borders, Inc.
Center for Community Alternatives
Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, Inc.
Center for Human Development
Center for New York City Affairs
Center for the Study of Social Policy
Children's Defense Fund-New York
Children's Rights
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Court Appointed Special Advocates of New York City (CASA-NYC)
Covenant House New York
Families Together in New York State
Fordham Law School Family Defense and Advocacy Clinic
Fordham University School of Law
Fourth Universalist Society in the City of New York
FPWA
Graham Windham
Hidden Water
Hunger Free America
Hunter Silberman School of Social Work
Jane M Spinak, Columbia University Law School (retired)
JMACforFamilies
Justice for Families
Justice4Impacted Community
Krase Consulting

Lawyers For Children
Legal Aid
Leigh Crutch & Associates
Long Island Families Together
Making the Tough Call
Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Parental Defense Division
Mental Health Advocates of Western New York
Mental Health Advocates of WNY
Middle Church
MJCF: Coalition
National Association of Social Workers, New York State
New York State Defenders Association
Next100
NYC Family Policy Project
NYS Citizen Review Panels
NYU Family Defense Clinic
Parents Supporting Parents NY
Prevent Child Abuse NY
Prophetic Whirlwind Fellowship
RISE
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
Schuyler County Public Defender
Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College
Sisters of Charity of New York
The Bronx Defenders
The Children's Agenda
The Legal Aid Society
Tiara Manning, Representative of Impacted Families
Unchained
University at Buffalo
Veronica Rivera Savage, LCSW, NYC DOE School Social Worker
We All Rise

Cc: Assembly Member Andrew Hevesi, Chair of the Committee on Children and Families
Senator Jabari Brisport, Chair of the Committee on Children and Families