



## In Celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, The Children's Defense Fund – New York Calls for a Just State Budget that Centers Children, Youth and Families

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**New York, N.Y.** – Today, as a part of its celebration of the life and world-changing legacy of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., renowned civil rights activist and one of the greatest nonviolent leaders in world history, the Children's Defense Fund – New York (CDF-NY) releases its Fiscal Year 2023- 2024 Legislative and Budget Agenda, titled [Prioritizing the Needs of Children, Youth and Families: New York State Budget and Legislative Priorities](#). CDF-NY calls on Governor Hochul and State Legislators to advance a just Fiscal Year 2024 budget that is community-informed and which prioritizes marginalized children, youth and families across New York State in ways that enable the state to take sizable, material action towards achieving its Child Poverty Reduction Act goal of reducing child poverty by 50%.

In doing so, CDF-NY remains guided by Dr. King's ever potent reminder to be "the conscience of the state...the guide and the critic of the state" and stands alongside our powerful young people and our communities in reminding New York's elected leaders that budgets are – first and foremost – moral documents.

Recent public commitments made as well as guidance provided by statewide elected officials on what is needed to address our State's shameful, immoral child poverty rate include the following:

- In October 2022, when [launching the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council](#), Governor Hochul shared: "Alleviating poverty for all New Yorkers - especially our youngest - is a key priority for my administration. The Advisory Council will examine both proven strategies and new approaches to further this goal and address the broad and

systemic inequities that perpetuate cycles of poverty in communities throughout New York State."

- In his December 2022 "[New Yorkers In Need: A Look at Poverty Trends in NYS for the Last Decade](#)" report, NYS Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli shared: "The COVID-19 pandemic had devastating health, economic and social consequences. In New York, the pandemic and ensuing economic shutdown produced almost 2 million job losses in 2020. Yet for many, economic hardships existed long before this time; the pandemic deepened the financial stress experienced by these households, fracturing the delicate balance often necessary to make ends meet. Even as jobs have returned, rising costs during a high inflationary period have also placed pressure on budgets, particularly for essentials like food and housing. Since 2014, poverty rates in New York have surpassed the national average. In 2021, the most recent year for which data are available, almost 2.7 million New Yorkers lived in poverty, or 13.9 percent, compared to 12.8 percent of all Americans. Poverty rates are higher than 13 percent in 17 counties, and in the State's largest cities. In addition, rates have been persistently high among some groups, including children; female heads of household; Black, Hispanic, American Indian and Pacific Islanders; people with disabilities; and those with less than a high school education. ... Committing to an equitable recovery and targeting resources to those who most need them can facilitate improvements in the lives of millions of New Yorkers."

The Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Budget is Governor Hochul's first opportunity to introduce a budget since the Child Poverty Reduction Act Advisory Council was convened and families are dealing with the burden of the current inflationary period. Governor Hochul and the State Legislature must show through the 2024 budget process that they are willing to exhibit the political courage necessary to create the needed political will to ultimately pass a budget that enables an equitable recovery that prioritizes ending child poverty in New York State.

"Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. truthfully declared: 'God never intended for one group of people to live in superfluous inordinate wealth, while others live in abject deadening poverty.' This injustice is glaring in New York, which is the state with the biggest wealth gaps in the country while also leading the U.S. with some of our cities receiving top rankings for having the worst child poverty rates among bigger cities. As Dr. King powerfully proclaimed: 'The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty.' Now is the time for the introduction and passage of a New York State budget that prioritizes first the needs of marginalized communities of color; sufficiently addresses the root causes of poverty; and makes great strides towards the abolition of poverty. Our children, youth, young adults, families, and communities are worthy of a budget that treats their needs as not only holy but also urgent. **Kercena A. Dozier, Executive Director of the Children's Defense Fund – New York.**

CDF-NY is the New York office of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), the only national, multi-issue advocacy organization working at the intersection of child well-being and racial justice. CDF envisions a nation where marginalized children flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being, and communities wield the power to ensure they thrive, and strives to advance the

well-being of America's most diverse generation – the 74 million children and youth under the age of 18 and 30 million young adults under the age of 25. CDF's grassroots movements in marginalized communities build power for child-centered public policy, informed by racial equity and the lived experience of children and youth.

“Nearly half of all children in Rochester, NY live in poverty according to the U.S Census Bureau. Rochester's child poverty rate ranks second highest in the nation of areas with a population of 100,000 or more. So, it is critical that Governor Hochul and the state prioritize marginalized children and families. There is a tribe in Africa called Masai whose traditional greeting to each other is ‘Casserian Engeri.’ It means, ‘And how are the children?’ This greeting is steeped in the belief that monitoring the well-being of their children is the best way to determine the future health and prosperity of their whole society. I wholeheartedly agree with this truth for not just the Masai tribe but for NYS and our nation as a whole. We too must monitor and secure the well-being of our children. When children prosper and their well-being thrives, we all benefit and fulfill Dr. King's dream, as expressed through the poor people's campaign, which was to address economic inequities.” **Rev. Myra Brown, Pastor of Spiritus Christi Church in Rochester, NY.**

“Buffalo, NY has one of the highest child poverty rates in the nation. Buffalo children and families need immediate budgetary relief that rises to the level of meeting and ending their unnecessary economic suffering. Budgetary relief that addresses: lead poisoning prevention; housing instability; food deserts; gun violence prevention rooted in addressing poverty; access to free, mental healthcare; increased and expanded cash supports; and free education services must be included in the Fiscal 2023-2024 budget, if we are to position our children and communities to be well and thriving. It is our Governor and State Legislators civic, human, and spiritual duty to do so.” **Rev. Paul J. Thomas, Pastor of Bethel AME Church-Buffalo, NY.**

“As I was driving I saw a pair of children's sneakers in the bus only lane. I thought there's a story that goes along with those forgotten shoes. The story of children who have faced the tragedy and trauma of being forgotten. Every child has a story. Some of those stories are positive and some are painful, but every child's story should be a story of possibilities and potential. The Children's Defense Fund helps our children to reclaim and rewrite their stories. CDF acknowledges and fights for the possibilities and the potential of our young people. They fight that those possibilities might become real so that young people are able to live into their potential, their greatness. That is why we celebrate the work, the commitment, and the faithfulness of the Children's Defense Fund and that is why I stand in support of CDF-NY as they stand at the front battling against false narratives and neglectful policies that limit access and life for our young people and children. It is imperative that our elected officials support CDF-NY's budget priorities, which are community-informed and will enable real access and opportunities for marginalized children and families throughout the State. Our elected officials must fight to secure equitable resources in education, health, housing, and employment for all of our young people, children, and families. We must understand that we are only liberated until all, especially the most vulnerable, are protected and valued.” **Rev. Brian Ellis-Gibbs, Pastor of Queens Baptist Church in New York City.**

The Children's Defense Fund-New York (CDF-NY) has a unique approach to improving conditions for children, combining research, public education, policy development, direct services, and advocacy. A recognized authority in the endeavor to protect New York children and strengthen their families, CDF-NY serves as a resource and partner for children, families and organizations throughout New York State.

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