

Prioritizing the Needs of Children, Youth and Families: New York State Budget and Legislative Priorities FY 2023 - 2024

WHAT'S AT STAKE

The COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the current high inflationary period has put an extra level of stress and strain on the already fragile health, safety and stability of our marginalized children, youth, youth adults, families, and communities in New York, which are disproportionately people and communities of color. As communities of color continue to navigate the triple crises of COVID-19, inflation, and systemic oppression rooted in racism, our State elected officials must do what is just, which is to put New York on a strong path to a just equitable recovery by centering and prioritizing the needs of the youngest New Yorkers along with marginalized children, youth and families in the FY 2023-2024 Budget and Legislative Session in ways that center their physical and mental wellness and economic health, thereby enabling them to have joy and to thrive.

Racial Justice

- *Require Racial and Ethnic Impact Statements for All Legislation and Rule-Making.* New York's pervasive racial and ethnic disparities must be addressed through systemic change by no longer passing legislation or adopting rules without first analyzing their potential impact on communities of color. New York should require all proposed rules and all bills leaving committee to be accompanied by a racial and ethnic impact statement, and prohibit the passage of bills or rules that can increase racial or ethnic disparities.

Economic Mobility

- *Expand the Empire State Child Credit.* One of the most effective ways to tackle child poverty is through refundable tax credits. New York State must secure a credit for children under age four (a group currently excluded altogether from New York's credit); make the credit available at the highest credit amount for those families with the lowest (including no) income; increase the credit to provide meaningful support for families; and ensure the credit continues to be available to as many immigrant families as possible.

- *Make the 2022 expansion of the State’s Earned Income Tax Credit permanent.* Tax-based financial assistance for families with children serves as a critical economic support for families at risk of poverty, which was never more apparent than during the COVID-19 pandemic. The State FY24 budget should include a permanent extension of the state’s enhanced Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which, in FY23, raised the benefit amount to thirty-five percent of the federal tax credit.
- *Establish the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) as a state funded and administered housing voucher to provide rental assistance to eligible individuals and families, regardless of immigration status.*

Health Justice

- *End Childhood Lead Poisoning in New York.* New York has more children with elevated blood lead levels than any other state. Lead exposure rates in some parts of New York are five to six times higher than those in Flint, Michigan at the height of its lead crisis, with children of color and children living in poverty disproportionately impacted. To reduce lead exposure, New York must make bold investments and must pivot to a prevention framework by enacting and funding proactive rental inspections to fund lead hazards before they harm children; establishing minimum maintenance standards for lead hazards in housing; and adopting a state Renovation, Repair and Painting (RRP) rule. The State must also prohibit insurance carriers from excluding coverage for lead exposure from landlord liability policies.
- *Expand Health Coverage for Children and Families.* Despite the coverage gains our State has made in recent years, too many New York families still lack affordable and comprehensive health coverage. While the New York Health Act would provide universal coverage for all New Yorkers, our State can make incremental progress by enacting legislation to expand coverage and care regardless of immigration status and implementing continuous coverage for children during their first six years of life to improve access to care and lower out-of-pocket costs.
- *Increase the Health Insurance Navigator Budget to guarantee high-quality enrollment services and provide additional funding to community-based organizations to educate consumers about coverage options.*
- *Assess Equity, Access and Quality of Telehealth Service Provision.* As New Yorkers of all ages increasingly turn to telehealth, it is incumbent upon our State to ensure equity, access, and quality in telehealth service provision, particularly for our Black and Brown communities who are disparately affected by the digital divide and for marginalized youth in need of behavioral health services.
- *Expand School Health Services.* New York must amend its Medicaid State Plan so that public schools can become approved locations where health and behavioral health

services can be provided to all Medicaid-enrolled students, not just to students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

- *Invest in Youth Mental Health.* New York must respond to the increasing mental health needs of New York's marginalized young people. The State must increase access to in-person behavioral health supports for youth who may lack access to telehealth services and create community safe spaces where young people can safely and privately access teletherapy services. Furthermore New York must bolster mental health supports and increase investments in suicide prevention resources for Black youth, who experience disproportionately high risk of suicide in our State. New York must establish a Black Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force to examine mental health policies and practice and improve prevention resources for Black youth ages 5 through 18.

Youth Justice

- *Raise the Age Reforms Must be Fully Funded.* The evidence shows overwhelmingly that the Raise the Age law has been successful for young people and their communities, despite its underfunding. While \$800 million has been allocated for Raise the Age reforms over the last 4 years of budget cycles, it has been publicly reported that only \$270 million of those State dollars have been invested in communities. We are looking to our elected leaders to ensure those funds are allocated to and actually reach the types of programs and community resources that can prevent gun violence, as well as offer support that our young people need, including mental health, education, restorative justice, and other trusted community-based programs.
- Investments must be equitable. Since Raise the Age was passed, New York City, which represents half of the youth justice system, has been excluded from receiving state funding. Permitting the City to access these dollars must be part of the budget this year. Similarly, communities across New York state need to have better access to these funds, meaning that counties must access the funds more easily, and community-based organizations and service providers must be allowed to apply and receive funds directly.
- *Reauthorize Close to Home and Restore State Financial Support.* Close to Home is a juvenile justice reform initiative designed to keep youth close to their families and community in New York City instead of state-operated placement facilities. It has operated successfully for a decade and is subject to reauthorization this year.
- *This is the Time for Youth Investment.* Overall, greater investments in youth are needed. The pandemic has dramatically exacerbated economic and housing insecurity and the behavioral health needs of youth. Budgetary investments must ensure youth access summer youth employment, health and behavioral health care, housing supports and subsidies, and restorative justice in schools. These investments keep young people safe and communities supported.

Child Welfare

- *Create a Children and Family Well-being Fund.* New York State would benefit from a new flexible approach to funding concrete resources and beneficial services that support all families, especially families living in historically underfunded communities that are particularly vulnerable to child welfare system involvement. Such a flexible funding system could bolster existing community assets and create the opportunity to fund new programs that will help to: eliminate conditions that lead to childhood trauma; enhance parents' ability to provide for their children; and help families avoid contact with the child welfare system. This funding system would have the ability to quickly infuse funds into communities, resulting in a more immediate increase in resources for families, thereby enhancing safety, stability, and well-being for children. This targeted approach could infuse funding into programs that serve families in communities that have been historically targeted by the child welfare system, resulting in their disproportionate representation in the system.
- *Fund KinGap outside the Foster Care Block Grant* so that overburdened and budget-constrained counties are not forced to choose between spending limited funds on foster care or kinship care, and substantially increase financial supports that help children leave foster care and live with family.
- *Increase funding for the NYS Unified Kinship Navigator system of care*, expanding access to services and supports for children in kinship families who are not in foster care.
- *Increase the child welfare housing subsidy* to support families and older youth in foster care. Lack of adequate housing is a factor that not only can bring a family to the attention of the child welfare system, but it can also be a barrier to reunification and discharge of a youth from care.
- *Provide funding for hiring, training, and supportive services for attorneys who provide legal representation to parents involved in the child welfare system.*

Child Care

- *Continue stabilizing and transforming the New York child care system.* We are a long way from a system of universal child care, and funding is absolutely critical in order to reach that important goal. This year, in order to move towards a universal system, New York must:
- Create a child care workforce compensation program to provide wage supplements to the essential child care workforce.
- Follow the lead of New York City and establish a state-funded, statewide Excluded Families Child Care Subsidy program to provide child care subsidies to immigrant families whose children are barred from accessing federal Child Care Development Block

Grant (CCDBG) subsidies on the same terms as all other families. All New York families need and deserve child care in all corners of the state.

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.