



**Testimony at the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Economic Development  
February 23, 2021**

**Provided by: Jenn O'Connor, Director of Policy and Advocacy**

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am Jenn O'Connor, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Prevent Child Abuse New York.

Prevent Child Abuse New York (PCANY) is a nonprofit organization that believes child abuse and neglect prevention occurs in communities--by strengthening families. We provide three primary services at the state and local level; **community awareness, training and technical assistance, and policy and advocacy.**

Our **community awareness and education** efforts are aimed at increasing knowledge about the Five Protective Factors. It is our belief that individuals can use the Five Protective Factors to help prevent child maltreatment. Specific programs include the Parent Helpline and the Pinwheels for Prevention Campaign. The Helpline is multilingual and provides free and confidential support for parents and caregivers. The Pinwheels for Prevention Campaign raises awareness about helping children thrive. These examples directly embody the Protective Factors framework by providing concrete support in times of need and educational opportunities. A collective understanding from community organizations and the public about how to foster resilient New York families can ensure longevity of strengths-based models.

Our **training and technical assistance** efforts provide professionals and communities with the knowledge, tools and resources to make great environments for families and children. We provide Healthy Families New York Home Visiting Certification and run the New York State Parenting Education Partnership, a program that provides support and resources for parents. The Enough Abuse Sexual Abuse Prevention, Community-based Strengthening Families, and Child Abuse Prevention courses offer multi-faceted educational opportunities. In addition, we provide direct staff consulting and mini grants to organizations that are implementing prevention strategies.

Finally, our **policy and advocacy** efforts drive initiatives at the Statewide and local level to change systems that impact child maltreatment issues. We advocate for evidence-based policy solutions that target root causes of child maltreatment, such as increases for early childhood home visiting, early care and education system

development, reduction of unplanned pregnancies, and family stability/economic issues. These advocacy efforts touch many facets of the early childhood realm, facilitating partnerships with several organizations that are devoted to helping the children and families of New York State.

**All of our work centers around the belief that child abuse occurs because families are under stress and not supported. Multi-generational trauma exists due to poverty, violence, and substance abuse (among other factors). PCANY focuses great attention on decreasing and addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) while increasing Protective Factors and Resilience. All of our budget asks would serve to strengthen families and the communities they live in. During this time of isolation, economic hardship, and racial tension, families need proven services and supports more than ever; we urge you to restore funding, maintain funding, and even invest in the following areas.**

### *BUDGET ASKS*

#### **Early Care and Education**

##### **Child Care**

Organizing care for one's child is a daunting task. Parents are strapped to find an affordable and conveniently located program that offers hours in alignment with their schedule. High-quality and developmentally-appropriate care is another factor to consider. When families find the ideal program, the cost is often too expensive to sustain for a household budget. High-quality child care costs an average of \$15,000 annually per child. This sum is prohibitively expensive for nearly all low- and middle-income families. Fewer than 20% of low-income families eligible for child care subsidies are receiving them. **The Executive Budget investment of \$40 million to reduce the burden of child care co-pays for families currently receiving subsidy is a step in the right direction to address child care availability and affordability in NYS. However, these are re-purposed subsidy dollars--not new funding.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened circumstances for parents and providers by decreasing program enrollment and impacting job security and financial stability. While many businesses closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, child care providers remained open as an essential service to families. While deemed essential, there are many child care deserts (or areas where there are no programs) throughout the State. **PCANY supports the \$6 million investment in start-up grants to address NYS child care deserts.** Expanding access to care and early childhood supports will help to decrease stress for some families.

**While some families utilized the child care services available to them, the workforce was dramatically impacted when women elected to stay home with their children as a caregiver to assist with online school or due to a lack of childcare.** While this issue is a gendered disparity, these trends are further bisected by

racial disparities. 26% of Hispanic women considered quitting their jobs, compared to 15% for Black and Asian women and 12% of white women. A large majority of the workforce has been impacted, which can have detrimental impacts on the economy.

Child care is an economic driver and high quality childcare is a public investment. At the federal level, child care has been recognized as an essential service that enables the professional working world to run smoothly. **PCANY supports increasing the value of the NYS employer-provided child care tax credit and the new Excelsior child care investment tax credit.** In terms of business development, this will help incentivize employers to expand access to child care and to return caregivers to the workforce.

**PCANY also supports the \$6 million investment in start-up grants to address NYS child care deserts.** Expanding access to care and early childhood supports will help decrease stress for some families. PCANY asks that you keep providers in mind in this Executive Budget when considering appropriations of federal child care stimulus funds.

**The allocation of \$46 million to the child care sector is an important aspect of the Executive Budget.** However, at least \$40 million of these funds are repurposed subsidy money provided to NYS last year by the federal government for this exact purpose. The Executive Budget maintenance of \$832 million for child care subsidies flows through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). This is not 'new' child care funding.

NYS did receive new funding in the form of \$163.6 million in CARES Act funds last spring. NYS's allocation of those federal funds has provided some relief to providers and families. **However, PCANY supports more sustainable investment of these funds in the future.** We expect to receive \$450 million from the next round of federal child care funding. In alignment with the Empire State Campaign for Child Care (ESCCC), Winning Beginning New York, and Raising New York recommendations, we propose utilization of the funds to support and stabilize the child care subsidy system long-term:

- Incrementally expand subsidy eligibility to at least 85% of the state median income
- Ensure subsidies are available to all income-eligible families who are unemployed and seeking work, pursuing higher education, or facing other issues.
- Ensure funding is available to provide supports and accommodations to families with children that have disabilities, a population that has had a particularly difficult time accessing child care services during the pandemic

NYS's child care providers and the families they serve deserve more than just a stop-gap approach. Immediate relief such as scholarships to essential workers and operating grants to programs helped many during the early days of the pandemic. Nearly a year in, we need to invest funding in a plan that creates a system that is affordable, equitable, high-quality, and coordinated. This system will bolster the economic stability of NYS and drive financial recovery efforts in the "post-war" era.

### After School

High-quality afterschool programs not only provide safe child care for school-age children; they strengthen the Protective Factors (such as relationships with caring adults) that are important for healthy development, especially for those with the highest need. **PCANY supports the focus of expanding access to after school programs in FY2022.** With this goal in mind, PCANY supports the Executive Budget maintenance of Empire State Afterschool and Summer Youth Employment.

Advantage After School Programs improve social, emotional, and academic competencies of children by providing a safe environment for children to learn after school hours. In addition to receiving quality social interaction, the burden of finding short-term child care in the few hours between the school and work day ends is alleviated for parents. **We urge you—as you do every year—to restore the \$5 million decrease in funding for Advantage After School Programs to prevent 2,500 - 5,000 students from losing after school care.** These funds provide grants for after school programs at a rate of \$2,000 per student.

We have attached the NYS Network for Youth Success's budget request to our testimony.

### Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting

Voluntary home visiting programs decrease abuse, improve health outcomes, and increase school readiness. Home visitors are a concrete source of support and a reliable resource to educate parents about child development and community services. These programs have had an impact on the opioid crisis by providing support to addicted mothers and babies. **Home-visiting is also a strategy to address poverty and promote economic self-sufficiency for low-income families. By building knowledge, skills, and providing emotional support, home visitors link parents with community resources such as educational opportunities and job training.**

**Prior to the pandemic, NYS was only serving 3% of all children aged 0-3 and 6% of babies in low-income families.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced programs to pivot, providing virtual visits as well as concrete supports such as food and diapers to families. According to an April 2020 survey by Raising New York, more than one-third of parents with infants and toddlers in NYS have skipped or cut back on meals and more than half feel uneasy about personal finances. These stressors contribute to a heightened state of chronic stress for the families of New York State. Coupled with a lack of parental buffering, the young children of these families are at an increased risk for experiencing ACEs and toxic stress. Investment in targeted support for children to offset these effects can contribute to healthier, more resilient New York families.

**Home visiting is a proven prevention strategy. Yet the Executive Budget includes a 20 percent cut to Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), from \$3 million to \$2.4 million. In addition, the elimination of Public Private Partnership grants to ParentChild+ and Parents as Teachers (PAT) programs, and 20 percent withholds on state funding to all programs, including Healthy Families New York (HFNY), have placed a significant financial strain on home visiting programs. As a result, many programs have been forced to lay off staff, reduce capacity, and in some instances, close their doors.**

**PCANY supports the Executive Budget maintenance of \$26 million in HFNY funding because it will support sustainability at existing sites.**

**PCANY also asks that you continue to support the First 1,000 Days on Medicaid Initiative, specifically the pilot project sights in Monroe, Chemung, Albany, and Brooklyn counties.** This project is a step in the right direction to expand access to programs by increasing light-touch screening and referrals to services. Ideally, PCANY wants universally-offered home visiting so that every new parent receives the benefits that so few are offered now.

#### *PCANY Home Visiting Coordination Initiative*

The Home Visiting Coordination Initiative (HVCI) is a forum for home visitors, parents, and community providers in the early childhood sector to collaborate and better support families. The project has yielded insight about the necessity for coordinated access to and delivery of home visiting programs in NYS.

The overarching theme from the Final 2020 HVCI Report was to develop a plan for statewide implementation of prenatal home visiting

- Implementation of universal prenatal home visiting (first in the country)
- Launch of a public awareness campaign to educate families and expectant parents about the benefits of home visiting
- Expansion of coordinated intake (one-stop-shop for families; referrals to the right program for them)
- Investment in workforce supports and professional development to increase staff (and therefore family) retention and decrease turnover; enhance program quality

We will continue to speak with you about legislative pathways to implementation of our recommendations, which will be released soon. **In the meantime, we ask that you shore up existing programs so that, when universally-offered home visiting becomes a reality, New York State has programs to refer higher need families to.**

#### *REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT*

##### *Primary Prevention*

### Family Resource Centers

Family Resource Centers (FRC's) are community-based sources of support for parents and caregivers. FRC's embody the Protective Factors framework by serving as a dependable resource for education and facilitating social connections for parents in communities. **In neighborhoods where FRC's are in place, the rate of child maltreatment decreases.** Flexible and family focused, FRC's provide a culturally-sensitive environment that can be especially important in the context of the dual pandemics facing our country today - COVID-19 and racial injustice.

FRC's are a potential place to launch a public education campaign or to promote information/resources about the COVID-19 vaccine. Communities that have experienced inequities and discrimination in healthcare appraise the vaccine with mistrust and tension. To promote the message about the vaccine's safety and effectiveness, and begin to remedy historically deep-seeded mistrust, please continue to support FRC presence in communities.

### Abusive Partner Intervention Programs

One out of four parents with young children in NYS worry about substance abuse and domestic violence in the family (Raising New York, 2020). Children and youth who live with domestic violence are affected by the experience. Children can display a variety of behaviors due to witnessing domestic violence and those behaviors can affect their ability to be successful in school and other social settings. Additionally, 30% to 60% of perpetrators of domestic violence abuse children in the household.

Abusive partner intervention programs in New York currently operate with no licensure or oversight. **PCANY echoes the OPDV request for oversight of abusive partner intervention programs.** This change will improve the response to accountability for those who harm and ensure that programs are appropriately monitored. Communities and the court system will then be able to confidently utilize this resource as a component of their response to domestic violence.

A streamlined system for domestic violence intervention and response overseen by OPDV can contribute to a unified, trauma-informed system in NYS.

### Parent/Community Education

Many important programs exist in NYS that enrich and improve children's lives. Frameworks that strengthen the operating capacity and connections between these programs, such as Help Me Grow (HMG), should be considered by NYS to fund and pursue. HMG is a system that coordinates community services such as health care, early learning services, nutrition information and parent support. HMG utilizes and builds upon existing community resources to better connect services to families, through the lens of nurturing a child's development and strengthening families. **Currently, the Help Me Grow model is being implemented in two locations in NYS - Onondaga**

## **County and Long Island.**

As a central hub for service delivery, HMG is a potential framework that could provide referral to home visiting services to families.

### Workforce Training

Policy and practice crafted to prevent re-traumatization and to address underlying emotional/social trauma is a strategy for workforce development. Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is especially relevant in the climate of the country today. Recruiting, hiring, and training staff with a trauma-informed lens will better facilitate retention. Knowledge about Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) and preventing ACEs is an important framework for law enforcement, healthcare, social services, and government agencies to consider.

PCANY will continue to pursue crafting trauma-informed curricula and training. **PCANY requests that our work is supported at the state level.**

## **Closing**

The country is facing a tumultuous era of uncertainty and unrest. Mounting tension surrounding public health and social issues have enveloped NYS. Governor Cuomo articulated in his unique State of the State address that New York is tough and that New Yorkers are resilient. However, these statements are in reference to the current generation. As we look toward the future, combatting the virus, stabilizing the State, and rebuilding in the wake of uncertainty, “Do we move forward or backward? *The future is in our hands.*” The *future* Governor Cuomo made reference to is the children of New York State. PCANY believes that resilience is fostered at an early age, when Protective Factors and prevention measures are deeply ingrained at the community level. In pursuit of this vision, PCANY urges that you consider our budget requests to strengthen families and serve New York children.

In closing, we support the agendas of coalition partners working on: kinship care, foster care, mental health, reproductive rights, and LGBTQ+ issues.