



THE LEGISLATURE
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

This is a draft document that will continue to evolve, edits will be made, and new programs may be added

Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor, New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

December 21, 2021

Dear Governor Hochul,

We, elected officials and organizations representing children and families, believe after decades of budget cuts and withholding funds from critical prevention programs, that now is the time for New York State to invest in the prevention supports that can mitigate the impact of trauma on children and families.

We propose that this year's Executive Budget include **The Children and Families Reinvestment Act** in order to help achieve a final enacted budget that centers children, youth, and families in communities, and:

- Infuses funds directly into chronically underfunded prevention and support programs;
- Establishes a new flexible funding stream to support innovative approaches to child wellbeing and position New York as a national leader; and
- Creates a Universal Child Care System

The Children and Families Reinvestment Act is necessary because a proactive approach with meaningful up-front investments will allow us to create a better New York, without recreating the negative consequences that we know will happen as a result of under-investment. We know that childhood trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences ("ACEs") lead to poor health and mental health outcomes, alcohol and substance use, self-harm, suicide, poor educational outcomes including dropping out of high school, housing insecurity and homelessness, incarceration and unemployment. This year's New York State budget cannot allow these ACEs to continue as they have.

As the pandemic drives increased rates of ACEs, including significant increases in parental and caregiver deaths, compromised health, and deepened economic insecurity, we recognize that tens of thousands of New York State's children and youth are now at exponentially greater risk of becoming

sick, addicted, unemployed, homeless, and or/incarcerated. In New York State, during the first few months of the pandemic, one in six hundred Black children and one in seven hundred Latinx children lost their parent or caregiver¹. A new study published in *Pediatrics* this month shows that nearly one in every five hundred children in the United States has lost a caregiver, and children of color have been disproportionately affected, with the highest loss of primary caregivers in California, Texas, and New York². Losing a primary or secondary caregiver is associated with a range of negative health effects, including lower self-esteem, a higher risk of suicide, and acts of violence. The same study found that addressing the impact of this level of devastation on children will “require intentional investment to address individual, community, and structural inequalities³.”

In order to recover, we must therefore make an intentional investment in supports that prevent children from experiencing hardship to begin with, mitigate trauma and its impacts, and services that help children to heal and to thrive. In New York State, programs that support children and families have been subject to annual proposals from the previous Governor to cut or eliminate funding for over a decade. While the Legislature has been successful in rejecting many of the former Governor’s proposals, tens of million of dollars have been taken away from programs that serve the most vulnerable children and families.

To undo that damage, we call on New York State to recover from more than a decade of underfunding the State’s commitment and:

1) **Pass a Bold State Budget that Centers Children, Youth, and Families by Infusing Funds into Chronically Underfunded Programs.**

New York State must:

- Reauthorize child welfare funding (Social Service Law §153-k), which sunsets 6/30/2022, and restore funding for children and family preventative services at the statutorily required 65%/35% reimbursement to counties.
- 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.
- Provide a stipend increase for foster parents.
- Provide funding for the intensification of salaries for equitable investment in the child welfare workforce.

¹ “COVID-19 Ripple Effect: The Impact of COVID-19 on Children in New York State,” United Hospital Fund, Sept. 30, 2020.

² “About 1 in 515 children in U.S. has lost caregiver because of COVID-19, study estimates,” CBS News, Oct. 7, 2021.

³ “COVID-19-Associated Orphanhood and Caregiver Death in the United States” *Pediatrics*, Oct. 1, 2021.

- Invest in workforce training and education through the [NYS Child Welfare Worker Incentive Scholarship Program](#) and the [NYS Child Welfare Worker Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program](#).
- Expand the New York State Child Tax Credit (amending section 606 of the Tax law of 2018).
- Increase funding for, and expand access to, Home Visiting, which is currently serving a very small percentage of all eligible children, so that we can set New York on a path to universal coverage.
- Increase funding for, and expand access to, Advantage Afterschool and other out-of-school time funding streams, setting New York on a path to universal access; and
- Increase funding for, and expand access to, The Youth Development Program, expanding access to services and supports through municipalities to child, youth, and family serving community-based organizations.

In addition to restoring these programs to funding levels that directly correlate to the increased and deepened needs as a result of the pandemic and economic crisis, we must also address a fundamental gap in our childhood trauma prevention and mitigation system in New York State.

Therefore, we call on New York State to:

2) Create a New Child and Family Wellbeing Fund

This fund will create a flexible and innovative funding program to support efforts to respond to children's and families' needs in communities, with avenues for community input and accountability. The fund would invest new State dollars in local projects, such as the following:

- Family Resource/Enrichment Centers (FRCs/FECs) are a “hub” for families to partake in free opportunities specific to their community -- parenting groups, child development activities, and culturally responsive events.
- Help Me Grow (HMG) is a system incorporated into an existing community organization. HMG prioritizes understanding the surrounding community to more effectively make referrals/connections, and to provide resources to families when they need support. HMG is a centralized point for families to receive free, accurate information about child development and parenting tips.
- Triple P (Positive Parenting Partnership) gives families simple strategies to prevent and treat behavioral and emotional issues in children and teenagers.
- New “home grown” models for programs supporting children, youth and families who have contact with the child welfare system and juvenile/criminal legal system, or who are served by multiple systems, including mental health.
- Community driven “whole child” approaches to primary prevention and neighborhood investment in child and family wellbeing.
- Direct cash support for youth and families.

With regard to child welfare services, this new fund would serve as a pipeline to future federal dollars - including reimbursement under the Federal Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)

- by expanding evidence and data collection of prevention programs created to reduce the number of children separated from their parents and placed in foster care.

Finally, we have all been witness to the systemic underfunding and dismantling of child care in New York State. The pinnacle of New York State's abandonment of child care came last year when the former Governor withheld billions in federal child care dollars from pandemic rescue packages, while hundreds of child care programs closed, many permanently.

Child care is not only necessary for our economic recovery, it strengthens families and benefits children by preventing and mitigating the effects of childhood trauma through resilience building, social connections, and other protective factors for our kids.

We call on New York State to:

3) Create a Universal Child Care System

New York State is currently facing a child care crisis of limited availability and access, and this year's potential infusion of federal funding is creating the perfect opportunity to finally move towards a system of truly universal childcare. Therefore, this year we can and must create a truly universal system, which adapts and builds upon several of the key principles set forth by the Child Care Availability Task Force.

- All children are universally covered.
- Funding for child care will be generous, predictable, consistent, and sustained long term.
- The system supports and properly funds a choice of modalities, including center-based and family-based child care, as well as family allowance options, and generous paid family leave for parents.
- The system promotes respect and just compensation for the child care workforce.
- Child care is available and accessible in all communities.
- Availability is not limited through bureaucratic red tape and burdensome means-testing requirements that inevitably leave the most vulnerable behind.
- All children, regardless of ages or type of setting, have quality care.
- System evaluation and reform is continuous and centered in quality and equity.

The chairs of the Children and Families committees of the New York State Legislature and many of their colleagues have been touring New York State to get the input and perspective of the State's child care providers and parents, as well as all relevant stakeholders, and will be introducing legislation that builds upon these experiences and the report of the Child Care Availability Task Force. As this year's New York State budget is negotiated, we ask that you engage with and incorporate the ideas that are being developed with meaningful input from advocates, child care providers, parents, and local administrators.

New York State's children and families can come back stronger post-pandemic if we make the necessary investments in their future. We are resolved to provide this foundation, to ensure that our children are not doomed or defined by the trauma inflicted upon them. We believe that the

provisions outlined in the **Children and Families Reinvestment Act** including a child and family-centered budget, a new fund for investment in local expertise and innovative community support, and a dedicated focus on child care is the answer

Sincerely,

Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi 28th A.D.
Chair, Standing Committee on Children and Families

Assemblywoman Jennifer Lunsford, 135th A.D
Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages, 22nd A.D
Assemblywoman Stefani Zinerman, 56th A.D
Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, 123rd A.D
Assemblywoman Mathylde Frontus, 46th A.D
Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas, 34th A.D
Assemblyman Demond Meeks, 137th A.D
Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre, 11th A.D
Assemblywoman Anna Kelles. 125th A.D
Assemblyman John T. McDonald III, 108th A.D
Assemblywoman Karines Reyes, 87th A.D
Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez, 80th A.D
Assemblyman Steven Cymbrowitz, 45th A.D
Assemblyman Charles Lavine, 13th A.D

Alliance for Quality Education (AQE)
Alliance of New York State YMCAs
Citizens' Committee for Children
Children's Defense Fund-New York
COFCCA
Families Together in New York State
NYS Kinship Navigator
Prevent Child Abuse New York
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
YMCA of Greater New York