



**Citizens' Committee
for Children** of NEW YORK



**Families
Together**
in New York State

TheChildren'sAgenda

Smart Choices. Bold Voices.

September 10, 2020

VIA EMAIL

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Majority Leader of the Senate
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building Room 907
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable Carl E. Heastie
Speaker of the Assembly
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building Room 932
Albany, NY 12248

Re: Protecting Children in the Budget

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Cousins and Speaker Heastie:

As children's policy organizations advocating for families across New York, we are deeply concerned about the impact of threatened state budget cuts that support essential services and programs for youth, especially among Black and Latinx communities who are suffering disproportionately during the COVID-19 crisis. We raise this issue now because the recent 20 percent withhold in aid to localities funding to counties, schools and community-based providers

is already disrupting the provision of services to children. The withhold is especially problematic as children head back to school and communities struggle to meet increased needs caused by the health and economic crisis.

The road ahead will be difficult, and you will face hard choices to ensure a fair and just budget for all New Yorkers. We ask you to center children and families in your priorities, and commit to protect essential programs that promote health, well-being, resilience, family stability, and community safety. That means **promising not to cut critical services in current and future budgets that hundreds of thousands of children rely on every day.**

In **Child Welfare**, this includes protecting community-based preventive services that help children stay at home with their parents. Because most CPS calls are allegations of neglect—not abuse—these kinds of supports can address the root cause for concern and have helped reduce the number of children in foster care by half. Cutting local preventive services increases risks for deeper system-involvement, including foster care, which will cost the state far more. Prevention and intervention programs in child welfare can save anywhere from \$2 to over \$20 per \$1 invested, demonstrating that maintaining funding for these services is both right for families, and fiscally sound.

In **Youth Justice**, cuts to community-based supports and programs threaten to undermine the progress New York has made in juvenile and criminal justice reform this session and over the last few years. State investment in key services that tackle child and family behavioral health needs and youth development supports are essential now and during the recovery ahead. This includes resources dedicated to vulnerable youth and those currently court-involved, like the Supervision and Treatment Services for Juveniles Program, preventive services, including diversion programs, and funds for local Raise the Age implementation.

In **Child Health**, Medicaid and vital public health programs provide the foundation for our entire health system and serve more than 2 million children. Some of these programs, like Medicaid Health Homes, provide children with complex trauma or multiple chronic medical conditions with access to services to improve their conditions and prevent the need for higher cost care. Other programs, like the lead poisoning prevention program, target specific conditions faced by children across the state. For example, the lead poisoning prevention program ensures children have safe and healthy housing, and prevents permanent brain damage and lifelong behavioral disorders that can arise from childhood lead exposure.

Cuts to these programs would leave children without services they need to stay healthy, and ready to learn and grow. Other critical child health programs include all Medicaid waiver programs, behavioral health care, the asthma program, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the diabetes prevention and control program, early intervention services, the healthy heart program, maternal and child health programs, obesity prevention programs, the physically handicapped children's program, school-based health centers and other school health services, the tobacco control program, and other community-based programs focused on improving child health outcomes.

In **Economic Justice**, child care subsidy, food and nutrition assistance, housing assistance, income support programs and tax credits for low-income families lift and keep children and families out of poverty. All of these programs serve our poorest and most vulnerable New Yorkers. To highlight the importance of some of these programs, it should be noted that prior to the pandemic 1 in 7 New Yorkers relied on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to avoid hunger. Nearly 60 percent of these individuals were living in families with children. And the child care subsidy program is particularly important for

families with young children, who are more likely to live in poverty than families with older children. In New York, these families are more disadvantaged than their peers in other states, as funding in New York is insufficient to provide child care assistance to all eligible families. It would be morally reprehensible for one of the wealthiest states in the nation to balance its budget on the backs of children and families served by these programs.

We thank you for your leadership during this crisis and look forward to continued partnership to ensure the well-being of New York's children.

Sincerely,

Naomi Post, Executive Director
Children's Defense Fund-New York

Jennifer March, Executive Director
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Paige Pierce, Chief Executive Officer
Families Together in New York State

Kate Breslin, President and CEO
Schuyler Center for Advocacy and Analysis

Larry Marx, Chief Executive Officer
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Allison Lake, Executive Director
Westchester Children's Association