



## Final State Budget Makes Strides in Child Care, But Still Misses Historic Opportunities to Invest in Children, Youth and Families

**May 5, 2022.** Mired in last-minute negotiations to roll-back recent criminal justice reforms, including Raise the Age, the final State Budget is a disappointment for children, youth and families. While we cannot overlook important new investments in child care and health care for new mothers, the budget still failed to prioritize our children. Instead of bold investments necessary to support our collective growth and recovery that centers communities of color, the Budget maintains the status quo in many ways, and fails to meet the moment that families face now.

*"We hope by passing the Youth Justice and Opportunities Act more young people will be able to move forward in a way that actually promotes justice, both for the people they live alongside of within their neighborhoods, and for them as individuals."*

- **Tianesha Drayton** | Policy & Youth Program Coordinator, Youth Represent

**Youth Justice:** New York State legislators reached a budgetary agreement preserving the Raise the Age law, despite Governor Hochul's last-minute effort to roll back this historic set of reforms. We are grateful for our champions in the New York State Senate and Assembly who stood up for New York's young people and fought for a more equitable criminal justice system during these negotiations. As New York's elected leaders look ahead, they must focus on real solutions that address the root causes of violence and are grounded in public health. **It is imperative that our elected leaders continue to protect Raise the Age and resist fear-based efforts to roll back the law during the upcoming legislative session.** Now, the Governor must ensure that New York fully funds Raise the Age implementation, making sure that resources reach counties quickly in order to support community-based organizations that directly serve our youth and communities. The State previously allocated \$800 million for RTA over the last 4 years, but only \$270 million has actually been invested in communities. This funding is crucial to support organizations that provide youth development, mentorship and violence-prevention services proven to reduce crime. **We demand the State follow through on these commitments and engage in more reform, including passing the Youth Justice and Opportunities Act.**

*"Children are the future and the pandemic has shown us that this future is bright. Children and adolescents need to have a way out of foster care and if we can do that by supporting extended families and people who are close to them, it's the right thing to do to ensure a promising future for foster youth."*

- **Justin Mercado** | Children's Defense Fund – New York Child Welfare Advocate & Liaison



**Child Welfare:** Faced with an opportunity to meet the State's statutory obligation to fund services critical to strengthening families and reducing the number of children placed in foster care, the final budget leaves communities without needed resources at a moment when they require so much more. We are profoundly disappointed with the Governor for her failure to act at this critical moment. Despite the Senate and Assembly One House Budget bills that would have built on the Executive Budget proposal in several long-overdue and important ways, the final budget: fails to restore the State match for child welfare prevention services and, therefore, impedes efforts to continue to reduce the number of children who are placed in foster care; fails to pull the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) out of the foster care block grant and, therefore, impedes the ability to give more children and youth an opportunity to permanently live with kin; fails to increase State funding required to implement a State settlement agreement to raise foster parent rates, shifting the burden of the State's obligation to address increased foster care costs on to counties; and fails to include prevention workers in the Human Services Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). We appreciate the 5.4% commitment to the other human services workers; however, prevention workers will now not receive the same treatment as their fellow human services workers. **In the weeks remaining in the legislative session, the Governor and the Legislature must prioritize the child welfare housing subsidy and pass legislation that will increase the value of the benefit for families and older youth leaving foster care (A1777B Hevesi / S5419B Brisport). The Senate must also pass and the Governor must sign legislation recently passed in the Assembly to protect people who are part of direct cash transfer projects, including former foster youth in New York City (A6709B Rosenthal / S5759B Brisport).**

*"Access to child care is more than a women's issue. It's an economic issue. It's a community issue. I have seen how my own child's mental health has been impacted by lack of access to child care."*

- **Stevie Vargas** | Upstate Campaign Coordinator, Alliance for Quality Education

**Economic Mobility:** The Budget makes significant investments in child care by including expanding eligibility for child care subsidies up to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), capping copays for families with incomes less than 300 percent of FPL at 10 percent of income over FPL, increasing the market rate, investing \$343 million to continue stabilization funds for child care providers and modifying requirements often used to exclude family child care providers and center-based programs from participating in universal pre-k. These important reforms will stabilize our child care system and take steps toward providing universal child care to the families who need it most. **However, we know these investments are only a start, and additional funding will be needed in the coming years. For example, the Budget unjustly excludes undocumented children from these child care investments, as well as children whose parents work in the informal or gig economies. New York must lead the way in ensuring universal child care.**

The Budget also takes incremental steps to bolster the Empire State Child Credit (ESCC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for Tax Year 2021 through supplemental payments to qualifying taxpayers. **In order to better support New York's children, young adults and families, New York must expand the ESCC and the EITC.** Our State must (1) expand the ESCC to include children under four, (2)



increase the value of the Credit to \$1,000 for young children and \$500 for older children, and (3) make the Credit fully available to low-income families by ending the exclusion of families with incomes under \$3,000 and the phase-in for the lowest income families. New York must expand the EITC by (1) increasing the percentage of the federal Credit paid to families from 30 percent to 40 percent, (2) expanding the Credit for young adults ages 18 through 24 without children who are currently ineligible for either the federal or state Credit, and (3) adjusting filing requirements to mimic those of the ESCC so more immigrant New Yorkers can file for the state EITC.

*"It's important we hear the voices of our children...that we don't leave out the voices of the very people that we are trying to serve. We cannot do this without them. I want to encourage all of us to give our young people an opportunity to share their experiences, for us to listen to their examples of strength and resilience and to think about strategies that they have and they've thought about for how we can support them as we move forward."*

- **Dr. Lena Green** | Executive Director, Healing on Purpose and Evolving (HOPE) Center

**Health Justice: We are grateful that the Budget takes steps to expand health coverage for New York children and families.** In particular, we applaud the Budget for eliminating the Child Health Plus monthly premium requirement for families earning below 223 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and for **expanding Child Health Plus benefits** to ensure that beneficiaries can receive the care they need, including home and community-based services, children and family treatment and support services, emergency ambulance services, medical supplies and services for undocumented children in foster care. We also celebrate the incremental steps taken by the Budget to **provide continuous 12-month post-pregnancy Medicaid coverage for all women**, regardless of their immigration status, and to ensure that our State's **immigrants ages 65 and older can access Medicaid for the first time**. Furthermore, the Budget **increases the income eligibility limit for the Essential Plan** from 200 percent to 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, meaning an estimated 14,000 uninsured New Yorkers will become newly eligible to receive health insurance and an additional 92,000 New Yorkers will have lower health care costs.

**The Budget failed to include \$345 million in funding for #Coverage4All legislation** to create a state-funded Essential Plan for New Yorkers earning up to 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level who remain barred from receiving health coverage due to their immigration status. By doing so, **New York is refusing to end the cruel and inexcusable exclusion of our most marginalized communities from accessing critical health services.**

*"I feel like oftentimes mental health is ignored with youth because we have this mentality that young people shouldn't have problems...That puts youth in a bad place where they may not even feel comfortable asking for help or support."*

*"Youth are spending a majority of their time in schools, so focusing on mental health in schools and institutions is extremely important. New York must pass the Mental Health Supports in Schools bill to ensure that all elementary, middle and high schools in New York State have a full-time licensed social worker and a full-time licensed psychologist on staff."*



- **Metzli Nieves** | *Children's Defense Fund - New York Beat the Odds® Scholar and Youth Advocate*

We applaud the Budget's investments in student mental health supports, particularly its allocation of \$10 million in student mental health support grants to school districts and \$100 million over two school-years to support school district efforts to offer enhanced educational and mental health supports. As New York's students continue to grapple with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and their own social-emotional development, it is imperative that we fully fund our mental health infrastructure in our schools. Guidance counselors and social workers are a crucial part of our education system. **New York must pass Mental Health Supports in Schools (S. 1969 Jackson / A. 5019 Gonzalez-Rojas)** to ensure all elementary, middle, and high schools in New York State have a full-time licensed social worker and a full-time licensed psychologist on staff to meet the needs of all students. To further provide critical mental health services to New York's children and to take full advantage of federal Medicaid reimbursement, **our State should amend its Medicaid State Plan so that public schools can become approved locations where health services can be provided to all Medicaid-enrolled students**, not just to students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), by passing S. 8639 Brouk / A. 9475 Reyes.

**It is absolutely critical for New York to prioritize bolstering mental health supports and increasing investments in suicide prevention resources for Black youth, who are a high-risk suicide population in our State.** We urge our State to pass S. 3408 Brouk / A. 1716 Jean-Pierre, which would establish a **Black Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force** in New York to examine mental health practices and improve suicide prevention resources for Black youth ages 5 through 18.

**Education Justice:** Many of New York's children, including children of color and children with disabilities attend schools that lack equitable funding and resources. The final budget will begin to re-write this narrative with an increase of \$2.1 billion, or 7.2%, compared to school year 2022, including a \$1.5 billion or 7.7% **increase for Foundation Aid**. As we recover from the academic as well as the social and emotional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our children, this funding is essential. The enacted budget also includes **\$100 million in funding for extended school day or school year programs, afterschool programs, mental health professionals and other locally-driven initiatives** to help meet the heightened needs of students across the State.

*"The issues on the ground are a lot more complex than what any legislation can do with just a stroke of a pen. This is boots on the ground – this is us doing it for us and coming together as a community."*

- **Pastor Mark Williams** | Elder of Youth, *Bethel Gospel Assembly*