

Good morning, and thank you for inviting me to come here today and talk about why NY must grow its investment in Maternal Home Visiting by at least 4.5 million.

I'm with Stop Abuse Campaign. We protect children by preventing trauma. Specifically, we prevent the life-altering trauma caused by child abuse, neglect and maltreatment.

Everyone knows child abuse is bad. When the framework for child protective services was built everyone knew child abuse was bad, but no one realized how bad. The Adverse Childhood Experience study from the Centers for Disease control proves that all child abuse, neglect or maltreatment causes permanent harm to children, even if it stops shortly after it starts. This research wasn't the first to prove that child maltreatment increases things like crime, mental illness and drug addiction but it was the first to prove it increased things like heart disease, diabetes and cancer. In other words, all child maltreatment is a matter of life and death. That means preventing it should be seen as urgent, not optional. We protect children by preventing trauma.

Last year Flint Michigan made decisions that predictably caused lead poisoning in thousands of children. Lead functions much like an Adverse Childhood Experience- it reduces a child's academic performance, it causes permanent health problems throughout their lives, and it increases their likelihood of being criminals as adults. As deplorable as the situation in Flint is, once it was discovered it became a huge news story, a huge embarrassment, and a career killer. But allowing children's minds, bodies and futures to be poisoned through preventable maltreatment is considered business as usual in NY. And New York has harmed more children in the 21 years it didn't invest in Maternal Home Visiting than .

NY justifies not investing in Maternal Home Visiting by saying we can't afford it. But somehow, we can afford its consequences. We don't like spending money on Child Protective Services, but we do it. It costs less to enroll a family for a year in most types of Maternal Home Visiting programs than a single CPS investigation costs. We don't like spending money on special education costs, but we do it. Children enrolled in Maternal Home Visiting programs are much less likely to need these services. We lament the toll opiates are taking on New York right now, but there is no talk of preventing this by investing in Maternal Home Visiting. We complain about the financial toll crime takes on our economy, but we don't fight it by investing in Maternal Home Visiting.

The one time we're willing to spend lavishly, without complaint, while investigating crime is when a child is murdered. On average, we spend over a million dollars investigating and prosecuting each of these murders. In Erie County alone 13 children have been murdered in 5 years. The rate of child abuse in Erie County is more than double the state average. At a million dollars a murder that's enough money to enroll over 300 families in Maternal Home Visiting program. A program we argue we can't afford.

Every year, about 250 of New York's children die directly from child abuse or neglect. The \$250 million spent investigating their deaths could have paid for the enrollment of about 81,000 children.

In October, I went to Vernay-lah Laventure's funeral. She was a four-month-old baby who was beaten to death by her mother. She was buried with a little white satin cap on her head. It hid how her skull was shattered when her mother beat her to death. Her mother was desperate, had a moment of intense desperation, and killed her daughter. This could have been prevented through Maternal Home Visiting and we should all feel the responsibility for her murder.

In January, I met some mothers in Healthy Families NY. One of them talked about how her baby was born with serious complications. She was alone, and had no idea how to help him. Her home visitor told her to read to him. Three other babies were in the same wing of the ICU with this baby, and hers was the only one who survived.

This mother has survived a lot of child abuse- I don't know her exact ACE score, but it's high. She has spent a lot of time as a psychiatric in-patient. And she has already had one heart attack and one stroke. Those are consequences of her abuse that cannot be undone. No prompt CPS response, no trauma-informed school, nothing we know how to do could do a good job at stopping those consequences from happening to her. But with the support of Maternal Home Visiting, she's been able to break the cycle and ensure her sons have better, healthier lives.

New York has two choices. We can maintain the status quo, a system full of broken mothers who break their children. Or we can invest in healing them, growing their potential, as mothers and as all-around humans. With that choice, we save children. We save money. We create a smarter, healthier, kinder generation. Or this legislature can vote to deprive these children of what they deserve and spend lavishly on the consequences. It's your choice.