



**Testimony at the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services
February 2, 2022
Provided by: Tim Hathaway, Executive Director**

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am Tim Hathaway, Executive Director of Prevent Child Abuse New York.

Prevent Child Abuse New York (PCANY) provides three primary services locally and across the state of New York. Our **community awareness** efforts increase understanding of how individuals can use the Protective Factors Framework to help prevent child maltreatment. Specific programs include the Parent Helpline and the Pinwheels for Prevention Campaign.

Our **training and technical assistance** efforts provide professionals and communities with 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, Enough Abuse Sexual Abuse Prevention, Community-based Strengthening Families and Child Abuse Prevention courses. In addition, we provide direct staff consulting and mini grants to organizations that are implementing prevention strategies. And we have just launched our Resilience Leadership and Learning Institute, so that we can provide training and consultation in a comprehensive manner to first responders, direct care providers, and administrators across the State.

Finally, our **policy and advocacy** work drives initiatives both at a state and local level, designed to change systems that impact child maltreatment. We advocate for evidence-based policy solutions that target the root causes of child abuse and neglect—solutions such as maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting; early care and education; and family stability/economic issues.

All of our work is centered in **prevention**. The risk of child abuse and neglect is decreased by supporting families with an ‘upstream’ approach. Providing concrete support in times of need, equipping parents/caregivers with knowledge about child development, and building parental resilience are Protective Factors that can reduce the

instance of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in a child's life. Furthermore, supporting families from the beginning and during times of need can reduce overall interactions with the social service and child welfare systems – such as entry into foster care and family court.

Multi-generational trauma exists due to a variety of factors, such as poverty, violence, and substance use. NYS took a bold step last year with a commitment to reduce child poverty by 50% in the next decade; this must be accomplished with a proactive (opposed to reactive) effort.

PCANY supports meaningful investments in primary prevention (supports that keep families out of systems like child welfare to begin with); we also advocate on behalf of secondary and tertiary supports/programs, which prevent trauma already experienced from manifesting further and optimize outcomes for families, respectively. Prevention is a continuum and **the Children and Families Reinvestment Act (CFRA)** is a clear example of a multi-pronged, critically important investment – with up-front priority for chronically underfunded programs and a new infusion of funds into the systems that interact with children and families.

The CFRA will: fund prevention and support programs, establish a new flexible funding stream to support innovative approaches to child wellbeing, and invest in a universal child care system. This is the beginning to a more comprehensive and systematic approach to supporting communities, families, and children. **We urge attention to the prevention priorities outlined by the CFRA– programs that will more than pay for themselves.** (Ex: A study in the state of Alabama found that for every dollar invested in FRCs, there was a return on investment of \$4.70.)

The federal **Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)** affords NYS the opportunity to strategically invest in programs that provide preventive measures and aid 'at-risk' families, before they touch the social service and child welfare systems. PCANY is encouraged by the vision put forth by OCFS in the draft FFPSA Prevention Plan and looks forward to seeing the final version.

Our budget asks are in alignment with the CFRA and with FFPSA and will serve to strengthen families and the communities they live in:

Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting

These voluntary programs are research-based and proven to decrease abuse, improve health outcomes, and increase school readiness. We know that these programs are helping to combat the opioid crisis by providing support to addicted mothers and babies. They are addressing the specific needs of immigrant families. And they are including fathers in their programs more than ever. Home visiting is a proven prevention strategy. Unfortunately, we are still only serving 3% of young children in low-income families and 6% of all young children.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, home visiting programs adapted (seemingly overnight) to provide families with diapers, formula, and even mental health support services in the community. Programs redefined service delivery within the scope of their models, meeting with families via Zoom or over the phone, or in locations outside the home. Programs worked to provide families experiencing limited access to internet services and resources with Wi-Fi hotspots. Home visitors even dropped supplies off (such as books and toys) in a contact-free manner on front porches for use during visits. More than ever, home visitors demonstrated their vital role in family support.

PCANY commends the investment of an additional \$11 million in Healthy Families New York, and the commitment to award new contracts by the NYS Office of Children and Family (OCFS) services. We expect 1,600 families to benefit from these services. PCANY houses the training and staff development team for Healthy Families New York, and is energized to expand the reach of these vital support services to families in every corner of the State.

PCANY requests additional investment in home visiting programs, specifically \$2 million for ParentChild+. ParentChild+ operates programs in multiple regions, including Long Island, NYC, and Onondaga, Rockland, Erie, and Westchester Counties. In addition, we are currently working to connect home visitors from ParentChild+ with new and expanding home-based/family child care programs through OCFS's child care deserts initiative (funded with \$100 million in federal stimulus funds). ParentChild+ is known for the training it provides and curriculum it shares with child care programs; **an increase of \$2 million to work with family child care providers would ensure that this professional development is possible.**

PCANY also asks for continued support for the work of the First 1,000 Days on Medicaid. The pilot sites will yield crucial insight about the operation of a system of coordinated intake in certain counties, as well as insight about the role of home visiting on the continuum of early childhood services.

The PCANY 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 formally articulated the necessity for coordinated access to and delivery of home visiting programs in NYS. **The overarching vision of home visiting in NYS is a formalized system of universally-offered home visiting in NYS. We will continue to speak with you about legislative pathways to implementation of this vision.**

Family Resource Centers

Family Resource Centers (FRCS) are community "hubs" that promote voluntary participation in diverse offerings, such as parent education classes, food pantries, and information/referral services. Although the programming and resources differ between each site, FRCs promote the Protective Factors Framework by strengthening families with social support, increased knowledge, concrete resources, fostering child

development, and enhancing family functioning. FRCs receive state funding through OCFS's William B. Hoyt Memorial Children and Family Trust Fund. There are currently 28 FRCs in our State.

PCANY is encouraged by the addition of 30 new Family Enrichment Centers (FECs) in New York City, and we look forward to learning about future plans for establishment and operation of other sites throughout NYS, using FFPSA dollars. We urge the State to open FRCs in every county.

Housing

Inadequate or unpredictable housing causes unnecessary stress for families, which can sometimes lead to abuse. No child should have to worry about having a roof over their head.

Research shows that when families get evicted, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect increases. We support adequate housing, and the provisions in the budget for a comprehensive 5-year housing plan. Safe and stable housing is a concrete support for children and families, ensuring a certain level of stability. **PCANY commends the \$25 billion investment to create and preserve 100,000 affordable homes over the next 5 years. Additionally, PCANY supports the eviction moratorium** because it will contribute to a reduction of family stress, decreasing the risk of abuse/neglect and preserving an environment in which parents are more equipped to raise their children.

Family Assessment Response

PCANY supports Family Assessment Response (FAR) as a family-centered, family-led approach to child welfare. In appropriate cases (with safety at the forefront), PCANY wholeheartedly prioritizes family strengthening and parent support.

Therefore, **PCANY supports the implementation of FAR in every county of NYS, with the caveat that funding is allocated to programming and the mandate is accompanied by adequate guidance from OCFS.** When implemented effectively, FAR exists in tandem with the local Child Protective Services agency, a complimentary offering for families that are eligible. Local Social Services Districts are not equipped to implement programming without funding and carefully devised guidelines, nor should they be expected to do so.

Early Care and Education

Child Care

The child care sector has seen chronic underfunding and underinvestment for far too long. Even pre-pandemic, parents struggled to find affordable, conveniently located programs that offered high-quality and developmentally-appropriate care, not to mention operating hours in alignment with a busy work schedule. Those programs that stayed

a float these past two years did so because of passion, determination, and much-needed federal funding. Providers were classified as essential workers— yet many do not make a suitable living wage. Still, they kept the economy from collapsing— allowing parents to continue to work. That said, the pandemic has taken its toll— primarily on the women of color who run these programs in the areas of the State hardest hit by COVID-19, and on the women who left the workforce in droves when programs closed and someone needed to stay home to care for the children.

We need to do more for providers and for parents. The proposed investment of \$75 million in unspent federal funds to support the workforce is a preliminary step to address compensation issues. We believe that there are additional unspent federal dollars that could be repurposed to support providers.

Furthermore, the aspiration to serve 100,000 more NYS families by allowing counties to increase the subsidy eligibility threshold from 200% to 225% of FPL this year is too modest. The Executive's plan is to increase eligibility incrementally, achieving 300% FPL in three years. Why is NYS waiting? Federal funding exists to increase eligibility immediately.

In alignment with the Empire State Campaign for Child Care (ESCCC), **PCANY requests a meaningful investment of \$5 billion dollars that would enable New York to take large steps toward achieving universal child care** (a goal of the Child Care Availability Task Force and an idea championed by Governor Hochul and other state leaders). The investments must do three things to guard against destabilizing the child care sector or inadvertently harming New York families as we transition to universal:

1. **Expand access to child care subsidies for children infant to school age—regardless of employment or immigration status or any other factor**
2. **Significantly raise child care workforce compensation by investing at least \$500 million**
3. **Increase child care provider reimbursement rates to reflect the true cost of care by investing \$600 million**

PCANY will continue to speak with you about legislative pathways to implementation of a bold vision for Universal Child Care in NYS.

Afterschool

Afterschool programs not only provide safe child care for school-age children; they strengthen Protective Factors for children and families, crucial for raising resilient children (especially those with the highest need). Afterschool programs nurture a child's social and emotional wellbeing by facilitating interpersonal relationship-building and educational opportunities during critical periods of development. Programs also assist parents with navigating their bustling life; providing quality, age-appropriate care for children and serving as a resource for parental education and support.

PCANY requests restoration of the \$5 million cut from the Advantage Afterschool Program and an additional investment of \$1.5 million in the Youth Development Program, as reflected in last year's enacted Budget.

PCANY will continue to speak with you about opportunities for a system of universal afterschool in NYS, coordinated with universal child care.

Closing

Thank you for considering our budget requests. We recognize that this is a pivotal moment for NYS – the availability of federal funding, innovative bill packages/agendas that prioritize the wellbeing of children and families, and an Administration that prioritizes transparency and innovation. We are on the cusp of meaningful systems change. **We know that child abuse and neglect is preventable if we invest in programs that support and strengthen families. We think that's money well spent.**

*Note: PCANY supports the full *Winning Beginning NY*, Empire State Campaign for Child Care, and the NYS Network for Youth Success agendas.