



**Testimony at the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services
February 13, 2023
Provided by: Tim Hathaway**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Tim Hathaway, Executive Director of Prevent Child Abuse NY (PCANY).

PCANY is the only private, nonprofit agency serving the entire state whose single mission is to prevent child abuse in all its forms. All of our work is centered in **prevention and strengthening families**. To us, “strengthening families” means decreasing parental stress, increasing the Protective Factors¹ surrounding children, and increasing familial bonds to build resilience. ***Our work is rooted in a belief in families and the knowledge that, given adequate and appropriate resources, all families can thrive.***

PCANY provides three primary services in Albany and statewide. 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 the knowledge, skills and resources to contribute to the creation of strong, healthy, and supportive 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. Our Resilience Leadership and Learning Institute, launched last year, provides comprehensive training and consultation for first responders, direct care providers, and administrators across the State.

Finally, our **policy and advocacy** work drives initiatives, at both the state and local levels, to improve systems that impact children and families. We advocate for evidence-based policy solutions that strengthen families, such as maternal, infant, and

¹ <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/About-Strengthening-Families.pdf>

early childhood home visiting; early care and education; and family economic stability. Paramount to the lens through which we view our work is the concept of **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 overall reduce 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, including poverty, violence, and substance use. With the passage of the NYS Child Poverty Reduction Act, NYS is taking bold steps to reduce child poverty by 50%. The State is also working to address substance use with public education and narcan outreach initiatives. This year, the Governor’s proposed investments in, and focus on, our mental health system are necessary measures to support all New Yorkers. **PCANY supports meaningful investments in what is often called primary prevention– interventions designed to prevent negative outcomes at the root cause before they begin, a proactive (opposed to reactive) effort.**

To that end, our budget request this year includes:

- Creation of the **Child and Family Wellbeing Fund (\$28M)**
- Investment of **\$175M in home visiting** that lays the foundation for universal access
- **Restoration of \$200,000 for ParentChild+ home visiting and \$200,000 for Docs for Tots/Help Me grow**, as well as an increase of **\$300,000** for each program
- Increased investments in **child care and afterschool programs**
- Passage of **Right to Counsel legislation**
- Restoration of the statutory State reimbursement rate of **65% for child welfare preventive funding**
- Restoration of funding for the **Kinship Navigator to \$320,500**, and for local kinship programs to **\$2,238,750**

The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund

Prevention is a continuum. The Fund is a clear example of a critically important investment. A flexible Fund dedicated to reinvesting in communities that have had disproportionately high involvement with the child welfare system will not only help to keep families out of systems like child welfare, but will *invest* in communities. **The Fund will create a dedicated funding stream for family and community strengthening initiatives** (sometimes called primary prevention), structured to utilize participatory grantmaking to streamline funding to initiatives deemed most needed, desired, and/or impactful in the identified communities. **We urge the State to invest \$28 million in the creation of this new, innovative approach to supporting families.**

Our budget asks are in alignment with the Child & Family Wellbeing Fund and strengthen families and the communities they live in:

Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting

These free, voluntary programs are research-based and proven to decrease the risk of child abuse, improve health outcomes, and increase school readiness. Home visiting also addresses the specific needs of immigrant families and encourages fatherhood engagement. **Unfortunately, NYS programs currently only serve 3% of young children in low-income families and 6% of all young children.** (*Early Childhood Home Visiting Data Snapshot; Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy; September 2020*)

In December 2022, the federal government passed a year-end funding package that included reauthorization of the Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. In addition to doubling the set-aside for tribal home visiting and instituting flexibility for telehealth and virtual home visiting, MIECHV received a funding increase for the first time ever: double the federal investment in the program and phased-in federal matching, which requires a 25% state match. ***Although these provisions do not begin until FY2024, we urge NYS to start considering the impact increased funding can have on the statewide home visiting infrastructure.***

The Healthy Families New York (HFNY) program received an \$11M investment last year. HFNY services will be offered in every county with these expansion dollars. In addition to this monumental step, the \$200,000 investment in ParentChild+ in the Executive Budget last year ensured that the program could continue operating in the State, and even expand its reach to share curriculum and training with home-based child care programs. **PCANY urges restoration of this \$200,000 line item for ParentChild+, to support further expansion and continue initiatives. We also elevate the request of ParentChild+-- an additional \$300,000 this year to further expand access and professional development opportunities.**

In a similar vein, we ask for restoration of the \$200,000 for Help Me Grow (administered by Docs for Tots), along with an increase of \$300,000 to expand that program, which compliments home visiting and other early childhood initiatives.

With the groundwork of these investments already in place, **PCANY asserts our critical, overarching vision of home visiting in NYS: a formalized system of universally-offered home visiting.** States like Oregon and New Jersey have already passed legislation to create universal newborn home nurse visitation programs and Arkansas recently introduced legislation. A universal approach aims to eliminate the stigma associated with “risk factors” and “eligibility.” **We are thankful to the Black, Hispanic, Puerto Rican, and Asian Caucus for including our request of \$175M to implement universally-offered home visiting in its Peoples Budget this year.**

Child Care

Parents struggle to find affordable, conveniently located programs that offer high-quality and developmentally-appropriate care, not to mention with operating hours in alignment with a busy work schedule. Providers – predominantly black and brown women – not only struggle to meet the demand for care, but struggle to keep their doors open and meet regulations, while making less than a retail or restaurant employee.

In alignment with the Empire State Campaign for Child Care (ESCCC), PCANY was encouraged by the Governor’s inclusion of child care as one of her top priorities. It was particularly important that the Governor repeated her commitment to investing \$7 billion over four years in order to create universal access to child care in New York State - and that she identified a robust and healthy child care system as essential not just to children and families, but to the State’s economy.

PCANY supports the following proposals from the Governor:

- **Increasing accessibility of systems for families** by streamlining and centralizing the subsidy application process and instituting automatic income eligibility when enrolled in other forms of public assistance (WIC, SNAP, etc.).
- **Capping co-pays at 1%** of family income over the federal poverty level (FPL).
- **Raising eligibility** by increasing the income limit to the maximum allowed by federal law, to cover families earning up to 85% of the state median income (SMI).

PCANY strongly supports the identification by the Executive of child care workforce compensation as a key priority– but the Governor’s proposal falls far short of what is needed. **PCANY uplifts the following recommendations of the ESCCC:**

- Direct investment in the child care workforce of \$1.2B, including \$1B to give every member of the workforce an average compensation increase of \$12,500.
- Increased access to child care (\$1.2B), including \$60M to extend child care assistance to children currently ineligible due to immigration status.

We will continue to speak with you about legislative pathways to universal child care.

Afterschool

Afterschool programs strengthen Protective Factors for children and families, crucial for raising resilient children. Afterschool programs nurture a child’s social and emotional wellbeing by facilitating interpersonal relationship-building and educational opportunities during critical periods of a child’s development. Programs assist parents with navigating their bustling lives; providing quality, age-appropriate care for children and serving as a resource for parental education and support. **PCANY urges swift restoration of the Executive’s \$5M cut to the Advantage Afterschool Program.**

In alignment with our partners, PCANY is encouraged by the preliminary steps put forward by the Executive to shift funding for the Empire Afterschool program from the

State Education Department to the NYS Office of Children and Family Services, which already administers the Advantage Afterschool program. Although this is the first step in the right direction, easing burdens for providers, **PCANY asserts the importance of ongoing work to streamline the budgetary landscape and ensure timely contracts and technical support.**

We support the asks of the statewide afterschool network, the NYS Network for Youth Success:

- Invest \$219M in a new Afterschool Learning and Enrichment Program (ALEP) initiative.
- Dedicate a \$500,000 line item in the budget for the New York State Network for Youth Success to provide technical assistance and supports for afterschool programs statewide.
- Invest \$3M to expand the educational incentive program.
- Establish an Office of Expanded Learning and a dedicated afterschool fund.
- Establish an afterschool taskforce to facilitate efforts toward a strong, aligned, and coordinated afterschool system.
- Develop a common policy and implementation framework between schools and afterschool programs to promote effective coordination and limit duplicative administrative burdens.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Legislature on building a system of universal afterschool, one that is coordinated with universal child care, across New York State.

Supporting Families & Preventing Involvement with the Child Welfare System

While PCANY's focus is on primary prevention, we also advocate on behalf of secondary and tertiary supports, which help to mitigate the impacts of trauma and optimize outcomes for children and families.

NYS has chronically underinvested in the programs and initiatives that support children and families who have become involved with the child welfare system. While our primary investment should be in the community-based supports that help to keep families out of the child welfare system, it is also important to ensure that supports are in place to bolster families and young people after they've been involved with the system.

To that end, **we urge the State to restore the statutory State reimbursement rate of 65% for child welfare preventive services. We also urge the State to update the housing subsidy for families and young people involved in the child welfare system from \$300/month to \$750/month and index it to inflation.**

PCANY advocates for policies that strengthen and support families – in all its forms. Grandparents, and other kin who step in to care for children when their parents cannot, often need support and access to resources to help meet children's needs. It is critical

for New York State to support the Kinship Navigator and accompanying supports for kinship caregivers. To that end, **we urge the State to restore funding for the Kinship Navigator to \$320,500, and for local kinship programs to \$2,238,750.**

Housing

One of the Governor's priorities this year is creating more housing. We know that 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. To that end, we support the provisions in the budget to make housing more affordable, streamline the housing approval process, and give priority to ensure populations struggling with mental health issues have access to housing. However, keeping families in their existing homes is also important.

Research shows that when families get evicted, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect increases. Safe and stable housing is a concrete support for children and families, ensuring a certain level of stability. **PCANY supports Right to Counsel legislation that would provide free legal services through an Office of Civil Representation to families in danger of eviction.** Right to Counsel 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.

Other Policy Priorities

In addition to our budget recommendations, we also support a number of other statewide initiatives that bolster children and families.

We recognize that there are countless programs throughout the State that touch children and families in different ways, whether it's offering support before it's sought out or further "downstream." For example, **we are encouraged by the robust, statewide investment and expansion of Family Resource, Family Opportunity, and Family Enrichment (in NYC) Centers and look forward to ongoing discussions to coordinate their work in the name of family support.**

Closing

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

*Note: Please find supporting documents attached to this testimony: The Children and

Families Well-being Fund one pager, the PCANY universally-offered home visiting one-pager, the Empire State Campaign for Child Care Budget Priorities document, the NYS Network for Youth Success Agenda, and the Right to Council priorities.