



# Citizens' Committee for Children of NEW YORK

Testimony of Alice Bufkin, Rebecca Charles, Juan Diaz, & Caitlyn Passaretti  
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

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Citizens' Committee for Children of New York is a 76-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, nor represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through research and advocacy. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

Thank you Chairs Weinstein and Krueger, as well as Chair Hevesi, Chair Brisport, Chair Persaud, Chair Davila, and all the members of the Assembly Ways and Means, Senate Finance, Assembly and Senate Children and Families, and Assembly and Senate Social Services Committees for holding today's Joint Hearing today and allowing us the opportunity to respond to Governor Hochul's Executive Budget.

In January 2023, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) released the [“Child & Family Well-being in New York State”](#) index, a comprehensive report that examines county-level data on economic security, housing stability, health care, education, youth, and families and communities. Findings from this report underscore the urgent need for the State to invest in solutions that lift incomes, increase housing stability, strengthen child developmental and behavioral health outcomes, enhance youth mobility, and enhance supports for families and communities. Below, we outline the steps our State must take through legislation and in the Fiscal Year 2023-24 Executive Budget to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

## Housing

New York State is facing a severe housing crisis. Rents continue to rise, eviction moratorium protection expired in January 2022, and eviction filings have risen dramatically. [A CCC Family Wellbeing Index](#) revealed in 49 counties in the state, more than 20 percent of rental households spend at least half of their income on rent.<sup>1</sup> In New York City, shelter capacity is at an all-time high, and for the seventh year in a row and over 100,000 New York City children experienced some form of homelessness, including 69,000 doubled-up and sharing the housing of others.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Child and Family Well-being in New York State (2023). Citizens' Committee for Children of New York Data Publications. Retrieved from: <https://cccnyc.org/data-publications/cfwbny2023/>

<sup>2</sup> “Student Homelessness In New York City, 2021–22.” Advocates for Children of New York. (2022). Retrieved from: [https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/nyc\\_student\\_homelessness\\_21-22.pdf?pt=1](https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/nyc_student_homelessness_21-22.pdf?pt=1)

Governor Hochul's plan to build 800,000 new housing units in the next ten years, including funding for infrastructure and basement legalization assistance, is a positive step for securing long-term housing options for families. However, we are deeply disappointed that her Executive Budget proposal does not include investments in creating or enhancing existing programs that will immediately address the devastating housing crisis currently facing New York families by helping them stay in their homes.

**As such, CCC supports the following legislation and funding to support families by preventing evictions, ensuring timely exits from shelter, and enabling more families to have access to housing stability regardless of their immigration status:**

- **Fund the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) to create New York's first ever statewide rental subsidy program (S2804B/A3701B).** This state funded and administered housing voucher will provide rental assistance to eligible individuals and families, regardless of immigration status, and will cover more families than are eligible for existing housing vouchers.
- **Require and fund social services districts to increase shelter allowances to match one hundred percent of the Fair Market Rent Standard and raise the allowance every time the market rents increase (A8900A/S8632).** This policy would allow vulnerable families to remain in their apartments and not face ongoing rental arrears that could potentially initiate housing court evictions.
- **Permit certain housing programs like CityFHEPS to be made available to individuals and families regardless of immigration status (A10510/S09416).** Throughout the State, undocumented families continue to struggle with accessing affordable housing, leading to overcrowded apartments, evictions, and homelessness.
- **Increase funding for ERAP to address over 100,000 pending applications.**

### **Early Childhood Education**

As we emerge from the pandemic, it is particularly critical to invest in accessible child care in order to combat the countless adverse effects of COVID-19 on New York's youngest children. Child care plays a key role in the early stages of development for young children, offering opportunities for social-emotional growth and academic achievement. Furthermore, a lack of child care disproportionately impacts working families and women of color, who are also the backbone of the child care workforce. In 2021, only seven percent of families in New York City with children under five reported being able to afford center-based child care, and women were two and half times more likely than men to cite a lack of child care as their primary reason for being out of work.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, according to CCC's latest Child and Family Well-being Index, in 29 counties across the state, less than 50 percent of 3 and 4-year-olds are enrolled in care.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, child care

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<sup>3</sup> Halkitis, S., Drobnjak, M., Hornick-Becker, D., Kimiager, B. "NYC's Child Care Affordability Crisis Displaces Women and Households with Low Incomes from the Labor Force." Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. (2020). Retrieved from: <https://cccnyc.org/data-publications/nycs-child-care-affordability-crisis-displaces-women-and-households-with-low-incomes-from-the-labor-force/>

<sup>4</sup> "Child and Family Well-being in New York State. Citizens' Committee for Children of New York Data Publications. (2023). Retrieved from: <https://cccnyc.org/data-publications/cfwbny2023/>

workers earn less than 97 percent of other occupations statewide, forcing many providers to live in poverty while they care for New York’s youngest children.<sup>5</sup>

We believe that child care should be affordable and accessible statewide for all children. We also believe that the State will not be able to achieve universal access to affordable child care without improving investments in and support for the child care workforce.

**We commend Governor Hochul for her proposals within the Executive Budget that would help propel New York State toward accessible child care for all, including:**

- Capping copays at 1 percent for families
- Increasing child care subsidy eligibility by raising the income limit to 85% of the state median income
- Automatic income eligibility for families enrolled in other forms of public assistance
- Investing \$125 million to further expand pre-K
- Calling on the State and Child Care Availability Task Force (CCATF) to continue evaluating alternative workforce compensation models, which will ideally lead to a new provider reimbursement methodology.

CCC supports these proposals and urges state leaders to ensure they are included in the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Enacted Budget. However, the state can go even further to transform New York’s child care system to work for all providers and families. **CCC, in partnership with the Empire State Campaign for Children (ESCCC), is calling on the state to support other essential child care investments and policy changes:**

- **Extend child care assistance program eligibility to undocumented families statewide.** Even as the state focuses on subsidy eligibility expansion, because of the bureaucratic obstacles within the current subsidy system, undocumented families will still be excluded from receiving support. CCC believes that child care should be accessible to all families, regardless of immigration status.
- **Invest \$1 billion to raise the median child worker pay by at least \$12,500 a year.** The Governor’s proposal to invest \$389 million into a third round of workforce stabilization grants does not even begin to meet the need to dramatically increase child care provider wages. We are calling for an investment that would offer more long-term stability for this workforce.
- **Eliminate benefit cliffs by allowing families whose income exceeds the current eligibility threshold to maintain and recertify their eligibility for assistance (up to 400% of Federal Poverty Level).** While the Governor has proposed to increase income eligibility to 85% of State Median Income from the current 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), her proposal does not address the existence of a sharp benefits cliff.
- **Provide a monthly per-child supplement to providers offering non-traditional hour care and fund a start-up grant program for providers seeking to offer non-traditional hour care.** Finding and accessing non-traditional hour care (overnight care, extended day care, etc.) is extremely difficult for families across the state. This proposal would incentivize providers to offer that care and hopefully create more options for families statewide.

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<sup>5</sup> “Child and Family Well-being in New York State. Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York Data Publications. (2023). Retrieved from: <https://cccnewyork.org/data-publications/cfwbny2023/>

- **Through legislation, enact presumptive eligibility for care.** Currently, administrative processing times can leave families waiting for months to be approved for subsidies. This would ensure that families do not need to wait for paperwork to be fully processed before beginning to receive assistance.
- **Allow counties to decouple work hours from child care subsidy eligibility** so that caregivers with fluctuating work schedules, caregivers a part of the gig economy, and caregivers with other needs outside of work hours are eligible for full-time subsidized child care if that is their preference.

## Child Welfare

In 2021, CCC partnered with the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) to develop a questionnaire with child welfare preventive service providers to gather insights based on their experience carrying out programs under existing contracts and responding to emerging needs of families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results from both the New York City and Statewide surveys shed light on the increased needs of families and how prevention service providers responded during the pandemic and point to both long-standing and emerging challenges that demand policy action. Namely, the survey reveals a wide range of needs that have increased because of the pandemic. Providers pivoted to meet families' needs by increasing cash and non-cash support and offering alternatives to in-person visits to ensure consistent communication and social distancing. However, prevention service provider agencies report crucial challenges with funding and staffing that limit their capacity to meet families' needs. In New York State, providers report that the pandemic has increased families' need for internet access, child care, mental health care, food, and many other supports.<sup>6</sup>

The heightened needs and economic insecurity New York families are experiencing due to this historic downturn increases risks to child safety and child and family well-being. In 2020, more than two-thirds, (72 per cent) of allegations of child maltreatment in New York City were related to concerns of neglect stemming from unmet basic needs due to economic hardship, such as insufficient or inadequate food, education, clothing, healthcare, and housing.<sup>7</sup> Child welfare preventive services are critical to maintain child safety and family stability. In the last two decades, we have seen a historic decline in the number of children in foster care; in New York City the foster care census has dropped from nearly 50,000 children to a record low 7,787 children in the foster care system in 2020, and the foster care census continues to decline.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, during the height of the pandemic and economic shutdown, many children living in low-income households faced greater risks because of the instability in employment, housing, disconnection from school and isolation from peers. In response to growing and deepened needs,

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<sup>6</sup> "Reimagining how to meet the needs of New York State's families in times of crisis: Findings from CCC-COFCCA survey of child welfare prevention services providers." Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. (2022). Retrieved from: <https://cccnyc.org/data-publications/reimagining-child-welfare-prevention-nys/>

<sup>7</sup> "Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations" Citizens' Committee for Children of New York Keeping Track Online. (2020). Retrieved from: <https://data.ccnyc.org/data/map/3/child-abuse-and-neglect-investigations#3/a/3/5/99/a/a>

<sup>8</sup> "Foster Care Population." Citizens' Committee for Children of New York Keeping Track Online. (2020). Retrieved from: <https://data.ccnyc.org/data/map/1399/foster-care-population#1399/a/3/1661/99/a/a>

preventive services providers quickly pivoted to deliver a wide array of family supports including alleviating food and housing insecurity; providing essential material supports and services such as cash aid, groceries, diapers, baby formula; offering remote academic supports for students, support groups for parents; and tele-therapy for children and adolescents.<sup>9</sup>

Now in 2023, many of these same issues are prevalent. Families still cannot meet basic needs and our child welfare system remains grossly underfunded. To support and uplift child wellbeing, the State must prioritize investing resources to services that support and strengthen families.

**To truly protect New York’s children and strengthen families, the state must prioritize investments in services proven to maintain child safety and keep families stable and together:**

- **Pass and fund all the components proposed in the Children and Family Reinvestment Act, a package of bills and policy that would give families more support and combat poverty.**
  - **Reinstate open-ended reimbursement for prevention services at the original rate of 75/25 state/county share.** This broad array of services for children and families – which includes counseling, housing and child care supports, and assistance in obtaining basic household goods – is designed to keep families facing crisis intact and prevent the need for further involvement with the child welfare system.
  - **Create a flexible Child and Family Well-being Fund for primary prevention** that would bolster community assets and create opportunities to fund new programs in historically underfunded communities that are particularly vulnerable to child welfare system involvement.
  - **Fund KinGAP outside the Foster Care Block Grant** so that overburdened, and budget-constrained counties are not forced to choose between spending limited funds on foster care or kinship care, and substantially increase financial supports that help children leave foster care and live with family.
  - **Create and fund** a UBI pilot for pregnant and parenting households with children under three years of age, focusing on counties with high rates of child poverty.
- **Increase** the Child Welfare Housing Voucher from \$300 to \$725 and adjust it annually to inflation.

New York must effectively implement federal family first legislation and ensure counties have the resources needed to strengthen families, reduce out-of-home placements in foster care, and prioritize family-based placement and reunification.

### **Youth Justice and Youth Services**

In face of the rhetoric that has dominated many recent news articles on crime in New York, we believe it is essential to make clear that youth crime is not rising in New York State or New York City. Youth crime and arrests have continued to decline over the past ten years. Furthermore, young people are much more likely to be a victim of a gun crime than a perpetrator of a gun crime. The fear

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<sup>9</sup> "Reimagining how to meet the needs of New York State's families in times of crisis: Findings from CCC-COFCCA survey of child welfare prevention services providers." Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. (2022). Retrieved from: <https://cccnyc.org/data-publications/reimagining-child-welfare-prevention-nys/>

mongering around crime that is currently permeating many media outlets is destructive, dangerous, and untrue.

Any incident of violence is unacceptable, and we strongly support efforts to reduce violence in communities and support victims of violence. But the path to true safety and wellbeing is not through criminalization but is instead through investments in youth and communities. Young people in New York have clearly expressed that they need and want access to housing, behavioral health care, afterschool programs, year-round employment opportunities and holistic supports – not further criminalization.<sup>10</sup>

CCC's recently released index on Child and Family Well-being, analyzing all 62 counties in New York, which demonstrates just how critical it is that we take action to address the challenges that New York's youth and families are experiencing in counties throughout the state.<sup>11</sup>

Out of 62 counties in New York State --

- In 22 counties, more than 20% of children live in households below the poverty level, which is higher than the national rate of 16%.
- In 49 counties, more than 20% of renter households spend at least half of their income on rent.
- In 29 counties, less than 50% of 3-and 4-year-olds are enrolled in early education programs.
- In 25 counties, more than 10 % of youth 20 to 24 are jobless yet actively seeking work.

These are severe structural issues causing instability for many youth and their families. We are clearly in a time where we need robust actions to lift incomes, stabilize housing, connect families to child care, and address rising behavioral needs. Public protection means public investment, and it is essential that we fund services that will support the rebuilding of our state and put families and youth first.

**CCC therefore strongly recommends the following proposals to ensure youth are supported and communities are safe:**

- **Reject** Executive Budget proposals that revisit Bail Reform.
- **Expedite** the distribution of Raise the Age funds to counties, prioritize getting resources to local CBOs that work directly with justice-involved youth, and ensure NYC can access RTA funds.
- **Reauthorize** and invest state funding in the Close to Home initiative.
- **Prioritize reaching special populations** – including homeless youth, youth aging out of foster care, youth leaving detention or placement, and undocumented young people – **with year-round youth development and employment training opportunities.**
- **Increase** investments in community-driven, youth informed violence interrupting initiatives and **support** the Executive Budget proposal to invest \$5.2 million for alternatives to

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<sup>10</sup> NYC Youth Agenda. (2022). Retrieved from: [https://www.canva.com/design/DAFBtx8Dqdg/Ud4nEBYfHwtoGu634JS11g/view?utm\\_content=DAFBtx8Dqdg&utm\\_campaign=designshare&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_source=publishsharelink#6](https://www.canva.com/design/DAFBtx8Dqdg/Ud4nEBYfHwtoGu634JS11g/view?utm_content=DAFBtx8Dqdg&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=publishsharelink#6)

<sup>11</sup> “Child and Family Wellbeing in New York State.” Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York. (2023). Retrieved from: <https://cccnewyork.org/data-publications/cfwbny2023/>

incarceration, ensuring that adequate funding is dedicated to alternatives to detention and incarceration that focus on reaching youth.

- **Pass the Youth Justice and Opportunity Act (S3426)** which will add protections for youth up to the age of 26, create a new status to classify this age group under, allow youth to have their records sealed, and enable them to access more supportive services.
- **Pass the Youth Interrogation Bill (A1963/S1099)** which ensures that young people under 18 must consult with legal counsel prior to being questioned by the police.
- **Pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Act (S1040)** to end the reliance on suspensions as the default way to discipline students and establish a framework to instead use proven restorative approaches to inappropriate behavior and discipline.

In addition, the Executive Budget includes several proposals that would support youth and communities, specifically in areas of positive youth development, employment and vocational training, and recovery from violence. **CCC supports these investments, but believes additional funding would expand their reach, impact, and improve outcomes for young people. These investments include:**

- The Executive Budget proposal to invest \$5 million for youth sports.
- The Executive Budget proposal to invest \$20 million for not-for-profit and government operated programs providing pretrial services.
- The Executive Budget proposal to invest \$20 million services and expenses related to partnerships and programs operated by government and community-based organizations to respond, repair and rebuild in the aftermath of violence, and serve the needs of communities and residents victimized by gun crimes.
- The Executive Budget proposal to invest \$9 million for vocational training programs and other employment opportunities for parolees, other offenders, or formerly incarcerated individuals in NYC.

While CCC is pleased to see a significantly deeper investment in communities impacted by violence through the GIVE program, we are wary of the portion of funding dedicated to expanding policing departments and technologies. The GIVE program in part funds “hot spot policing,” which uses crime data to determine which locations have the most crime and works with communities to increase law enforcement’s presence.<sup>12</sup> This type of programming has been shown to have a harmful effect on communities, particularly heavily policed Black and Latinx communities; in fact, the police who murdered Tyre Nichols and Breonna Taylor were members of hot spot policing initiatives. However, the GIVE program also supports deeply beneficial programming including violence interrupters, outreach, programs, and environmental designs changes that will also decrease violence. **CCC urges the legislature to move funding to support violence interrupting and community safety initiatives that are chosen and directed by community members themselves, rather than towards enhanced policing.**

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<sup>12</sup> Givens, A. “Gov. Hochul wants to double funding for gun violence reduction in 17 upstate communities.” Gothamist. (2023). Retrieved from: [https://gothamist.com/news/gov-hochul-wants-to-double-funding-for-gun-violence-reduction-in-17-upstate-communities?utm\\_source=sfmc&utm\\_medium=nypr-email&utm\\_campaign=Gothamist+Daily+Newsletter&utm\\_term=https://gothamist.com/news/gov-hochul-wants-to-double-funding-for-gun-violence-reduction-in-17-upstate-communities&utm\\_id=178082&sfmc\\_id=69449359&utm\\_content=202328&nypr\\_member=False](https://gothamist.com/news/gov-hochul-wants-to-double-funding-for-gun-violence-reduction-in-17-upstate-communities?utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=nypr-email&utm_campaign=Gothamist+Daily+Newsletter&utm_term=https://gothamist.com/news/gov-hochul-wants-to-double-funding-for-gun-violence-reduction-in-17-upstate-communities&utm_id=178082&sfmc_id=69449359&utm_content=202328&nypr_member=False)

## Child Poverty

For the last three years, families across the state have continued to struggle with the compounding effects of Covid-19, job insecurity and reduced income, housing instability and food insecurity, and a 40-year high inflation rate that has dramatically increased the costs of basic needs. With slow economic recovery affected by a 40-year high inflation rate and a cost of living significantly higher than the national average, too many families across the state are struggling. [CCC's Child & Family Well-being in New York State Index](#) revealed that close to 746,000 children in the state live in households with incomes below the federal poverty level. Said another way, in 22 counties, more than 20% of children live in households below the poverty level.

In New York State, children of color face the greatest effects of poverty, with 28 percent of Black and 25 percent Latino families struggling with poverty compared to the overall state total of 18 percent.<sup>13</sup> In New York City, 35 percent of children suffer from the negative effects of poverty.<sup>14</sup> In Upstate New York, Syracuse has the highest child poverty among large cities in the United State at 48.8 percent, followed by Rochester at 48.2 percent.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, one in seven children in the state struggle with food insecurity, and this number is even higher for undocumented families.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, a recent report from The State Comptroller's Office found that child poverty in the state is close to 5 percent higher than the adult overall population, and female-led households are twice as likely to live in poverty.<sup>17</sup> The Comptroller's Report also recognized the work of the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council to reduce state child poverty in half over the next decade, and it recommended the continuation of the economic reforms enacted in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including the expansion of the state's tax credits.

It is urgent that state leaders enact a comprehensive set of investments that address the challenges of child poverty and food insecurity in this year's budget.

### **CCC supports the following policy and budget reforms to address child poverty in New York State:**

- **Increase and index the minimum wage to inflation to support almost 2.9 million workers throughout the state (S3062/A7503).** The proposed Raise Up New York legislation would index annual statewide increases to inflation and labor productivity.

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<sup>13</sup> "Children in poverty by race and ethnicity in New York." The Annie E Cassie Foundation. (2020). Retrieved from: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/44-children-in-poverty-by-race-and-ethnicity#detailed/1/any/false/2048,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867/10,11,9,12,1,185,13/324,323>

<sup>14</sup> Neckerman, K., Brooks-Gunn, J., Gandhi, K., Jia, Y., Maury, M., Waldfogel, J. "Poverty and Hardship Among Families with Young Children Before and During the Pandemic." Center on Poverty & Social Policy & Robin Hood. (2020). Retrieved from:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/610831a16c95260dbd68934a/t/62c74892a2b7f36d6b88ddfa/1657227411>

<sup>15</sup> Tampone, K. "Syracuse leads the U.S. with worst child poverty among bigger cities, census says." (2022). Retrieved from: <https://www.syracuse.com/data/2022/03/syracuse-leads-the-us-with-worst-child-poverty-among-bigger-cities-census-says.html>

<sup>16</sup> "Empty Plates: Hunger Reduction Advances Eaten Up by Aid Cuts and Inflation." (2022). Hunger Free America. Retrieved from: [https://hfa-website.cdn.prismic.io/hfa-website/7928054a-bbc2-47e1-9a5f-3a42f8b4f785\\_2022+New+York+Hunger+Report+Final.pdf](https://hfa-website.cdn.prismic.io/hfa-website/7928054a-bbc2-47e1-9a5f-3a42f8b4f785_2022+New+York+Hunger+Report+Final.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> "New Yorkers in Need: A Look at Poverty Trends in New York State for the Last Decade." New York State Comptroller's Office. (2022). Retrieved from: <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/new-yorkers-need-look-poverty-trends-new-york-state-last-decade>



- **Eliminate the sub-minimum wage to support over 250,000 tip-wage workers who were left out of minimum wage increases (A2244/S808).**
- **Establish and fund universal school meals statewide (A1941/S1678).** Requiring universal school meals will help reduce hunger, eliminate stigma, and help improve the health, wellbeing, and academic success of students. The expiration of federal funding for free school meals has hurt students and families across New York, resulting in more than 726,000 students and nearly 2,000 schools losing access to free school meals.
- **Expand and deepen the New York State Earned Income Tax Credit.** The State FY24 Budget should build on the deepening of the EITC in the FY23 Budget by permanently increasing the percentage of the state credit paid to families from 30% to 45% of the federal credit and adjust filing requirements so all immigrant tax-filers can access the credit.
- **Enhance the Empire State Child Credit** to ensure that households with children under 4 years of age are eligible, ensure that credits are greatest for lowest income households, and ensure that all immigrants filing taxes with an ITIN receive the full tax credit.
- **Increase the basic cash grant, including the utility allowance, to reflect inflation (A9130/S9513).**

### **Human Services Workforce**

CCC commends Governor Hochul's commitment of \$1 billion for mental health in the Executive Budget. This commitment speaks to the growing recognition among state leaders of the urgent need to address the mental health crisis, and creates hope for a truly transformative future for the behavioral health system.

As important as proposed capital investments are for the behavioral health system, however, they do not address the fundamental barrier putting families on waitlists and preventing children from accessing care: our state does not have the workforce necessary to meet the behavioral health needs of children and families. Until our state addresses this fundamental crisis, we will never be able to meet the unmet need in the state.

In New York, there are only 28 child psychiatrists per 100,000 children in the state. In many counties, there are none. Access to other behavioral health provider types is in equally short supply. Frighteningly, families throughout the state are facing waitlists in the hundreds or more, forced to wait months for services they desperately need today. For instance, one provider in Western New York has a seven-month wait for outpatient clinic services, while another capital region provider of community-based services has twice as many children waiting for services as they have capacity to serve. Families from across the state are reporting similar stories of impossibly long waitlists and the inability to access care.

**State leaders must support an 8.5% COLA for health, behavioral health and human services workers to address the workforce shortage and waitlists crisis.** While the Governor's proposal of 2.5% COLA is a step in the right direction, it falls far short of what is needed to support an adequate workforce.