



**Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees
on the SFY 2026-27 Executive Budget
Human Services Budget Hearing
February 5, 2026**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the 2026-27 New York State Executive Budget. The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA) is a 153-year-old statewide, nonprofit organization dedicated to policy analysis and advocacy in support of public systems that meet the needs of disenfranchised populations and people living in poverty, particularly children and families.

Top Human Services Budget Recommendations for 2026

Child care

- Adopt the Executive Budget's \$1.7 billion proposal to significantly expand pre-K and 3-K, fund the child care assistance program, and to launch universal child care pilots, including 2-Care in New York City and community care models for children ages zero to three in three communities outside of New York City. If these proposals are included in the final budget, along with additional funding to ensure adequate and equitable compensation for the early childhood and afterschool workforce, and are carefully implemented, they will be game-changing for New York families, and will move New York State decisively closer to achieving statewide universal pre-K, child care, and afterschool.
- Provide ongoing and reliable compensation supplements to all members of the child care workforce until New York has achieved statewide universal child care that pays providers adequate rates to pay the workforce a thriving wage (\$1.2 billion). New York cannot achieve universal child care without recruiting and retaining far more professionals in the field, which is not possible without a significant, sustained, compensation hike.
- Adopt the Governor's proposal to invest \$60 million to support Community Care models in three communities, and add more funds if necessary to ensure they are truly universal, and are treated not as one-time pilots, but as a bridge to statewide universal child care. All modalities of care—including center and home-based child care providers—must be able to participate in these models.

Afterschool

- Adopt the Executive Budget's proposed \$116,060,000 for the Learning and Enrichment Afterschool Program (LEAPS), which includes an increase of \$6,320,000 from last year's Enacted Budget to cover increases in the state minimum wage and add an additional \$180 million to enhance and expand the LEAPS grant.
- Add funding for universal afterschool as a part of the universal child care pilots being implemented in Broome, Dutchess, and Monroe counties. For many families with multiple children, access to free pre-K and even free child care for their young children, will not be

enough to enable them to work without afterschool care. Pre-K and elementary school hours end at 3 p.m., long before most workdays.

Home visiting

- Support the \$26 million and the supplemental \$11 million included in the Executive Budget for Healthy Families New York.
- Support the \$3 million included in the Executive Budget for Nurse-Family Partnership and add an additional \$1.5 million.
- Add \$500,000 for ParentChild+ to support their programs and access and professional development opportunities.

Child welfare services

- Establish a Child and Family Wellbeing Fund at \$30 million to support communities historically impacted by involvement in the child welfare system and high child poverty.
- Increase compensation for New York’s human services workforce with a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) of at least 2.7%.
- Restore funding for the Kinship Navigator to \$320,500, and for local kinship support programs to \$1.9 million.
- Expand investment in the Foster Youth College Success Initiative to \$10 million.

Child poverty reduction and affordability for families

- Strengthen and build upon last year’s expansions of the state’s child tax credit by increasing the credit amount to \$1,500 per child per year, indexing the amount to inflation, including children to age 18, and ensuring that the changes are permanent. The State’s refundable tax credits, the Empire State Child Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit, are designed to support low- and middle-income families. More robust investment would make them more inclusive, more meaningful in amount, and restructuring them would direct the largest credits to the families that need them most.
- Support New York’s transition to chip-enabled EBT cards for SNAP recipients.
- Establish a state food benefit to ensure that all families who need it can access nutrition support, including households with children who are ineligible for SNAP based on citizenship status.
- Increase the Public Assistance grant and shelter allowance.

In 2026, New York State faces significant headwinds from federal actions pushing against New York’s efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of low-income and marginalized New Yorkers, and the state’s movement to end child poverty. This moment requires New York lawmakers to act with boldness and resolve to prioritize those New Yorkers struggling each

month to keep the lights and heat on, food on the table, the car fixed – particularly families with children. In 2021, New York enacted the Child Poverty Reduction Act, committing in statute to cutting child poverty in half by 2032. This long-term commitment was intended to shore up state leaders to prioritize the State’s children in good times and in times of challenge. To stay true to this promise, we urge state leaders to act with intention to pass a final 2026-27 NYS Budget that protects children and families from harm inflicted through cuts to federal funding, while continuing to advance a poverty-fighting agenda.

CHILD CARE, PRE-K, AND AFTERSCHOOL

Among the Schuyler Center’s top priorities for New York children and families is to achieve a high-quality, coordinated, early education and afterschool system that is universally available to all families with children ages zero through 12, and free to all. Universal access to high quality pre-K and child care has myriad benefits for children, including improved health outcomes and kindergarten-readiness, and is among the most effective strategies for reducing child poverty and shoring up the economic security of families with children. ^{1,2}

We are thrilled the Executive Budget proposes significant new investments in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), pre-K and 3-K, and to launch universal child care pilots, including 2-Care in New York City and community care models for children ages zero to three in three communities outside of New York City. These proposals align to a large degree with the Empire State Campaign for Child Care’s vision for universal child care in New York State – one which includes children birth through 13; puts low-income families first; prioritizes fairly compensating the workforce; maximizes federal child care assistance funds during the rollout; and stages the rollout to avoid unintended consequences like increased tuition for middle-income families, or a loss of already scarce infant and toddler capacity.

Looking ahead, we urge state leaders to ensure these expansions are carefully implemented to avoid unintentionally destabilizing child care programs, causing a greater shortage of infant and toddler seats – which are already in short supply. We cannot meet the affordability challenges facing New York families, nor achieve the state’s goal of universal child care and pre-K, unless we act with intention to ensure we don’t expand care for one age group of children at the expense of other age groups.

Child care assistance and universal child care pilots

For more information on this topic, please read our following briefs:

- [***Prioritizing Low-Income Families in Rollout of Universal Child Care***](#). Attached to the testimony.
- **The Empire State Campaign for Child Care’s** [***New York State Child Care for All: The Plan to Achieve It***](#). Attached to the testimony.

The Executive Budget proposes \$1.2 billion in new, recurring funding for CCAP - the largest increase to CCAP in New York State history, indicating a commitment to prioritizing low-income families as the state builds toward statewide universal child care and pre-K. In addition, the Community Care model proposal (\$60 million) and 2-Care proposal (in NYC) (\$73 million) represent an important step away from the traditional model of providing child care only to families that meet onerous income, immigration status, and activities tests toward a

model that recognizes child care is a public good that should be available to all children and families.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:

- Adopt the Governor’s proposed \$1.2 billion recurring investment in New York’s Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and add additional funding as needed to ensure no eligible families are turned away or placed on waitlists. As of January 2026, 33 counties and NYC have closed enrollment or started waitlists because demand is outpacing investment in the program, leaving thousands of eligible families across the state scrambling to patch together care for their children, with some having to reduce their work hours or leave the workforce altogether.³
 - CCAP funding is typically not available to counties until the October following the passage of the state budget (following the federal fiscal year). Recognizing the urgent need to reopen CCAP enrollment in these counties as soon as possible, the Executive Budget makes some of the proposed CCAP funds available to counties immediately upon passage of the budget (\$155 million to counties outside of NYC; \$475 million for NYC). Unfortunately, the budget includes requirements that may make it difficult for counties outside of NYC to access those funds – including that they can only use those funds for claims ending before September 30, 2026 – a quick turnaround given the budget will be finalized at the earliest April 1. Notably, the 2025-26 enacted budget made \$50 million immediately available to counties outside of New York City upon passage of the budget on the same terms and the restrictions prevented most counties from accessing the funds.
 - We urge the Legislature to work with the Executive to secure language changes to ensure there are no barriers to counties accessing CCAP funds as soon as the budget is finalized. It is likely that the best way to address this is for the state to allow counties to claim their portion of the \$155 million in either the current or upcoming federal fiscal year (ending on September 30, 2027) to better reflect counties’ spending obligations. **New York families are depending on counties to reopen CCAP enrollment across NYS as soon as possible.**
- Adopt the Governor’s proposal to invest \$60 million to support Community Care models in three communities, and add more funds if necessary to ensure they are truly universal, and are treated not as one-time pilots, but as a bridge to statewide universal child care. All modalities of care—including center and home-based child care providers—must be able to participate in these models.

Invest in the early childhood workforce to ensure a successful rollout of universal child care

For more information on this topic, please read our brief: [Universal High-Quality Child Care Requires Paying the Workforce a Thriving Wage](#). Attached to the testimony.

The Executive Budget allocates no funds for the child care workforce. If no funding is added before the budget is finalized, this will be the second year in a row since the pandemic that there are no funds for the child care workforce. Notably, this workforce includes many pre-K

teachers who teach pre-K in community-based settings. In 2023, one-time retention bonuses were awarded to child care educators: \$3,000 full time; \$2,300 afterschool. In 2024, bonuses were \$2,250 for full time educators; \$1,725 for afterschool.⁴

We cannot achieve universal child care or pre-K without recruiting and retaining far more professionals in the field. The average wage for the child care workforce (94% women, and more than 53% people of color) is approximately \$38,000, with family-based providers earning even less. In contrast, the median annual salary for full-time New York workers is approximately \$67,000 per year.^{5,6}

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:

Build upon the Governor’s strong child care and pre-K proposals by providing ongoing and reliable compensation supplements to all members of the child care workforce until New York has achieved statewide universal child care that pays providers adequate rates to pay the workforce a thriving wage.

- Create a permanent state fund and invest \$1.2 billion to increase child care worker compensation sufficient to offer all members of the child care workforce a significant boost in income (Child Care Workforce Pay Equity Fund S.5533 (Brisport)/A.492 (Hevesi)).
- Develop a plan for subsequent years to establish a minimum pay scale and career ladder based on agreed-upon criteria to inform compensation supplement levels after the base pay scale for all has been increased.

Invest in Universal Afterschool Programs

High-quality afterschool programs have been shown to help close the achievement gap for children in low-income families and enable families to achieve economic stability. In addition, for many families with multiple children, access to free pre-K and even free child care for their young children, will not be enough to enable them to work without afterschool care. Pre-K and elementary school hours end at 3 p.m., long before most workdays. Afterschool must be recognized as an essential component of universal child care.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:

- Adopt the Executive Budget’s proposed \$116,060,000 for the Learning and Enrichment Afterschool Program (LEAPS), which includes an increase of \$6,320,000 from last year’s Enacted Budget to cover increases in the state minimum wage and add an additional \$180 million to enhance and expand the (LEAPS) grant.
- Add funding for universal afterschool as a part of the universal child care pilots being implemented in Broome, Dutchess and Monroe counties.

Pre-K

While not a part of the human services budget, it is important to note the importance of the Executive Budget’s proposal to significantly expand pre-K for 4-year-olds outside of New York City, and 3-year-olds in New York City. For this expansion to meet the needs of New York families, it must be implemented in coordination with child care and afterschool.

The **Executive Budget** proposes a \$431 million increase for universal pre-K aid for the 2026-27 school year, as well as \$131 million to fill gaps for pre-K for three-year-olds in New York City, for a **total increase of \$561 million for pre-K**, bringing total proposed state pre-K investment to approximately \$1.761 billion. The proposal includes raising rates for all school districts to \$10,000 per child or their selected Foundation Aid per pupil amount, whichever is higher.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:

- Adopt the Governor’s proposal to invest approximately \$561 million to expand universal pre-K aid for 4-year olds outside of New York City and to fill gaps for pre-K for three-year-olds in New York City, and to create a uniform statewide pre-K grant funded at either \$10,000 per pupil or the district’s current selected Foundation Aid per pupil, whichever is greater.
- Ensure expansions of pre-K along with 3K and 2-Care in NYC are undertaken in a manner that fully integrates center and home-based child care programs into the expansions. This is necessary to ensure expansions do not unintentionally destabilize child care programs and lead to a greater shortage of infant and toddler seats—which are already in short supply. We cannot meet the affordability challenges facing New York families, nor achieve the state’s goal of universal child care and pre-K, unless we act with intention to ensure we don’t expand care for one age group of children at the expense of other age groups. Instead, we must both protect existing care capacity for children ages zero through 12, and build out new capacity to meet the needs of all age groups, along with the needs of children with disabilities, and of parents who need non-traditional hour care.
- One important way to prevent pre-K expansions from destabilizing child care programs is to ensure that community-based child care programs and home-based child care programs have a fair opportunity to participate in pre-K. Currently, school districts are required to contract with CBOs in their district for at least 10% of seats, and are permitted to keep a percentage of the pre-K per child grant amount to cover administrative costs. As these pre-K expansions are implemented, we urge the state to consider increasing the minimum percentage of seats school districts must contract with CBOs to provide, and lowering the maximum amount of administrative costs the districts may keep for administrative costs.

HOME VISITING

Make Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Available to All Who Need It

Maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting is recognized across the nation as a uniquely effective approach to family strengthening, with myriad benefits to children and families’ health, well-being, and economic security. Home visiting has been proven to improve birth outcomes; increase high school graduation rates for children who received home visiting services while young; increase workforce participation and lower rates of welfare dependency; and reduce instances of child maltreatment. Home visiting is a proven, cost-effective intervention that yields tremendous savings over the lifetime of children in the form of lower health care costs and improved earnings as adults. Unfortunately, home visiting services are available to less than five percent of families with young children in New York State and are entirely unavailable in some areas.

To support State investment in home visiting to maintain existing programs and expand services to more families Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:

- Support the \$26 million and the supplemental \$11 million included in the Executive Budget for Healthy Families New York.
- Support the \$3 million included in the Executive Budget for Nurse-Family Partnership and add an additional \$1.5 million.
- Restore \$200,000 for ParentChild+ and add an additional \$300,000 to support further expansion of their programs and access and professional development opportunities.

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Establish the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund

For more information on this topic, please read our following briefs:

- [**Transforming New York's Child Welfare System by Investing in Families**](#). Attached to the testimony.
- [**Child and Family Wellbeing Fund**](#). Attached to the testimony.

Every year, nearly 100,000 families experience unfounded Child Protective Services (CPS) investigations. CPS investigations last as long as two months and often involve invasive procedures such as searching the home and interviewing family members. This tremendous stress and upheaval impacts not just the family, but the neighborhood, especially in communities experiencing disproportionate CPS intervention and high child poverty rates.

A Child and Family Wellbeing Fund would support children's growth and development by investing resources in 10 of the communities that have been historically impacted by CPS. The state of a neighborhood has both health and economic impacts on children—improving the state of neighborhoods would provide benefits to children even if their own family is struggling. The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund would help ensure that all New York children live in neighborhoods that support their wellbeing.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to establish the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund at \$30 million.

Invest in the Human Services Workforce

Human Services workers provide supportive programs to New York's children and families, including the administration and navigation of foster care, adoption, kinship, and supportive housing for young people.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to invest in the human services workforce with a cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) of at least 2.7%.

Restore Funding for Kinship Caregiver Services and the Kinship Navigator Program

Hundreds of thousands of children in New York live with grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends when their parents are unable or unwilling care for them, a significant number of which are children placed in direct custody arrangements with kin by the child

welfare system. In direct custody placements, children are cared for by kin who do not receive financial support. Local kinship caregiver programs offer important supports and services to kin, a majority of whom are grandparents, who often care for children at home with extremely limited resources. Kinship caregiver programs provide information about family members' rights, support to meet children's education and health needs, and assistance with obtaining health and social service benefits.

The New York State Kinship Navigator is a statewide resource and referral network for kinship families, providing information and connections to important resources.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to restore funding for the Kinship Navigator to \$320,500, and for local kinship support programs to \$1.9 million.

Support Young People Who Have Experienced Foster Care So They Can Pursue Higher Education

Only two to seven percent of foster youth complete a two- or four-year degree. Yet, the best way to ensure that a young person will secure and retain good-paying employment in adulthood is a college education.

The Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI) supports young people who have experienced foster care and are attending college, including by covering costs such as tuition and fees, books, transportation, housing, medical and personal expenses. FYCSI also supports young people with advisement and tutoring. FYCSI supports over a thousand students every year through successful completion of their course of study. More students avail themselves of FYCSI support each year.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to expand investment in the Foster Youth College Success Initiative to \$10 million.

END CHILD POVERTY AND STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC SUPPORT FOR NEW YORK FAMILIES

For more information on this topic, please read our brief: [Upholding New York's Commitment to Reduce Child Poverty](#). Attached to the testimony.

Far too many children in New York State live in poverty, and many more are in families struggling to make ends meet. For more than a decade now, New York's child poverty rate has hovered around 20%. Stated another way, nearly one in five New York children live in poverty, and New York State ranks 40th in the nation in terms of child poverty.

In 2021, the New York State Legislature passed, and Governor Hochul signed into law, the Child Poverty Reduction Act. The Act commits the State to reducing child poverty by half by 2031 and establishes the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC), which is tasked with monitoring the State's progress and making policy recommendations to move the state toward its goal. CPRAC, now entering its third year as an advisory council, has recognized that progress toward a statewide reduction in child poverty requires sustained and systemic approaches that uplift children and families in all New York communities—rural, urban, and suburban.

Strengthen and Ensure Families Can Access the Child Tax Credit and EITC

For more information on this topic, please read our brief: [**Creating Economic Opportunity for Families through Tax Credits and Cash Benefits**](#). Attached to the testimony.

To take bold, strategic action to move New York State decisively toward its stated commitment to cutting child poverty by 50%, **Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:**

- Strengthen and expand New York’s child tax credit by building on last year’s expansions. Specifically, to have the greatest impact on child poverty and deliver the greatest tax savings to families struggling to make ends meet, we urge the Legislature to build upon the Executive Budget’s proposal by:
 - increasing the credit amount of the Empire State Child Credit (ESCC) to \$1,500 per child per year for all children 0-18, as recommended by the State’s Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council, to provide families meaningful support;
 - indexing the credit to inflation so that families continue to receive the full value of the credit;
 - ensuring that all of these changes are permanent so that families can rely on the credit each year.
- We also urge the Legislature to strengthen the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) so that all working New Yorkers who are eligible may file, including those filing with an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN), as is permitted with the ESCC, and increasing the value of the credit.

Protect and Strengthen SNAP, WIC, and Other Food Security Programs

Amid rising food insecurity and unprecedented cuts to federal nutrition programs, this year’s budget must protect New Yorkers’ access to SNAP, WIC, and other critical anti-hunger programs. We support Executive Budget proposals to transition to EBT chip cards, increase funding for emergency food programs, and expand access to summer nutrition programs—and more is needed to respond to the food security crisis at hand.

Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:

- While not a part of the human services budget, it is important to note the urgent need for \$30 million in supplemental WIC funding to ensure local agencies can serve all eligible families seeking services and reach more of the approximately 200,000 eligible but unenrolled New Yorkers. New York can also strengthen our emergency food system by investing in the Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program and Nourish New York. These investments will support food security, health, and affordability for New Yorkers.
- Increase Access to SNAP Benefits: The New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC), recently recommended the creation a state food benefit for households with children who are ineligible for SNAP based on citizenship status, as a pathway towards cutting child poverty by half by 2031. That policy is expected to cost \$140.8 million and reach 64,600 households with children each year. An additional estimated 41,000 individuals are newly excluded from SNAP due to federal changes under the HR1. The program would be run through the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) with administration led by local social service districts, and provide benefits equal

to the benefits provided for similarly situated SNAP-eligible households. All currently-excluded immigrant groups would be eligible, including those on 5-year waiting periods.

Reform Cash Assistance to Help More New Yorkers in a Time of Need

For decades, New York has let Cash Assistance, its foundational program for the lowest income New York families, fall far behind what is needed for the most minimal economic security. Now, more than ever, as families across the state face cuts to many vital programs, New York must act to bolster programs—like Cash Assistance—for which they have the discretion to set levels of Assistance.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:

- Act on the CPRAC’s recommendations to strengthen Cash Assistance by increasing the basic allowance by 100%, indexing it to inflation, applying the same earned income disregards for applicants as for recipients so that more working families can participate in the program, and eliminating the public assistance resource limit to allow families to build toward long-term economic stability.⁷
- Stabilize housing for more New York families living in poverty by increasing the Public Assistance housing allowance to bring it in line with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) fair market rent. Currently at a statewide average of \$347 for a household of four, the public assistance (PA) housing allowance was last adjusted over twenty years ago—in 2003.^{8,9}

About Us

Schuyler Center is the home of and participates in the leadership of [Empire State Campaign for Child Care](#), a campaign that advocates for universal child care in New York State and the compensation child care providers deserve, and [New York Can End Child Poverty](#), a group dedicated to ending child poverty in New York. Schuyler Center also participates in the leadership of the [Child and Family Wellbeing Action Network](#) (CFWAN), made up of advocates, providers, and people impacted by New York’s child welfare system working towards a vision of New York where the state prioritizes investing in and implementing policies that strengthen and support children, youth and families; serves on Steering Committees for *Raising New York*, dedicated to the health and well-being of the youngest New Yorkers; *Kids Can’t Wait*, focused on reform and improvement of New York’s Early Intervention program. Dede Hill, Schuyler Center’s Vice President of Policy, was an appointee to New York’s Child Care Availability Task Force and is a member of New York’s Early Childhood Advisory Council, and Kate Breslin, Schuyler Center’s President and CEO, is an appointee to New York’s Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council.

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