



**Written testimony submitted to the Joint Fiscal Committees
on the SFY 2026-2027 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. Founded in 2021, NYC Family Policy Project (FPP) explores and builds evidence—through original research, policy and data analysis—for the policy visions of parents and youth impacted by the child welfare system. Policy visions developed by the advocacy groups [Rise](#), [YouthNPower](#) and the [Narrowing the Front Door to NYC’s Child Welfare System Work Group](#) emphasize the need for a limited child welfare system and expansive and reparative investment in families and communities. FPP focuses on economic investments that can strengthen family well-being and reduce child welfare involvement; investments in community conditions that support healthy family life; and policy and practice efforts to move toward a more limited child welfare system with a narrow front door.

In recent years, parent-led activism and new research have documented the harmful effects and enormous scope of child welfare investigations, with 1 in 10 children in many of New York City’s Black and Latino neighborhoods experiencing a knock on the door in a single year. Almost 45% of all Black and Latino children in the city experience an investigation of their family by age 18. Statewide, these impacts are even more striking. Many zip codes across Broome, Erie, Onondaga and other counties have investigation rates that are twice as high as even the highest impacted communities in the city, with 1 in 6 children experiencing an investigation each year.

Dozens of studies on the effects of economic policies on child welfare involvement find that policies that protect against economic hardships, shocks and setbacks reduce investigations, maltreatment and family separation.¹ Specifically:

- New York City’s Universal pre-K was associated with a 7 to 23% reduction in investigation rates for neglect, and this effect was especially pronounced for New York City’s Black and Latino children (Hong et al., 2025).
- A 10% increase in refundable state Earned Income Tax Credits is associated with a 5% decline in any reported maltreatment and 9% decline in reported neglect (Kovsi et al., 2022).
- Access to public assistance buffers against repeat child welfare investigations, especially when kids are 0-4 (12% lower likelihood of any investigation and 50% lower physical abuse investigations) (Cai, 2021).

¹ The national child welfare research center Chapin Hall has synthesized much of this research in a comprehensive slide deck, [linked](#).

- Each additional \$1,000 that states spend annually on public benefit programs per person living in poverty is associated with a reduction of 4.3% in child maltreatment hotline calls, 4% in substantiated maltreatment, 2.1% in removals and 7.7% in child fatalities (Puls et al., 2021).

Further, families benefit in unique ways when cash support is significant enough to cover basic needs; is provided in ways that are dependable and aren't time-consuming and shaming; and can be accessed in difficult times. Results from dozens of guaranteed income pilots show that families are able to stabilize, plan ahead, save, meet children's needs and spend more time together when offered reliable, significant support provided without strings attached. Currently, cash policy in New York does not ensure that families have enough to live on and cash assistance is unpredictable, burdensome and stigmatizing while leaving families vulnerable to frightening and traumatic state intervention.

FPP applauds the Governor's acknowledgment of the deep economic stress families face, particularly at birth and when children are young, and the Governor's embrace of economic support through child care as a strategy to fight poverty and promote family well-being.

Child welfare involvement is most likely when families face income shocks and most common when children are young.² Newborns and infants who come to the attention of the child welfare system in New York City remain much more likely to enter foster care after an investigation than older children. In New York City and nationally, these children are less likely to return home and more likely to be adopted, especially newborns. Further expanding care options for families of newborns and infants is key to continuing to reduce family separation, especially permanent family separation. FPP is hopeful that the Governor's restructuring of the Empire State Child Credit (ESCC) and introduction of the BABY Benefit will bring the double benefit of strengthening family well-being and reducing investigations.

The Executive Budget includes several exciting proposals to expand economic support for families, particularly the commitment to build towards universal child care with the launch of 2-Care in New York City. We support the Executive Budget's inclusion of \$66 million for universal child care pilots for children 0-3 in Dutchess, Monroe, and Broome Counties. Several zip codes in Binghamton, Broome County and Rochester, Monroe County, had investigation rates that were more than triple the state average—150 per 1,000 children, or almost 1 in 6 children, experienced an investigation in 2022. New research conducted in New York City found that expanded Universal Pre-K care was associated with reductions in investigations of neglect, with pronounced reductions in rates for Black and Latino children. Expansion of child care options upstate and in NYC will also prevent needless state intrusion in families.

FPP priorities align with the recommendations of the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC), [linked](#). In 2021, the New York State Legislature passed, and Governor Hochul signed into law, the Child Poverty Reduction Act. The Act committed the State to cut child poverty in half over 10 years and the governor appointed the CPRAC to examine potential policy recommendations that can enable the State to reach that goal.

² Conrad-Hiebner, A., & Byram, E. (2018). The Temporal Impact of Economic Insecurity on Child Maltreatment: A Systematic Review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(1), 157-178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018756122>

FPP Top Budget Recommendations

Community Investment to Address Conditions of Poverty

- Establish the Child and Family Well-Being Fund for communities highly impacted by child welfare to fund grassroots community groups that support families (S.6431 Brisport / A.63 Hevesi).

Unconditional Cash Transfers or Guaranteed Income

- Provide direct and recurring cash assistance to income-eligible parents, for the last three months of pregnancy and first 18 months of a child's life (A.1597 Clark / S.2132 Ramos).

Child Care

- Adopt the Governor's proposal to expand pre-K and 3-K, fund the child care assistance program and launch universal child care pilots.
- Ensure pay parity for child care providers across center-based care and home care, and across community-based contractors and DOE employees.

Cash and Food Assistance

- Increase the benefit amount so families can meet their basic needs, lowering stress and increasing the time parents can spend with their children (A.106 Rosenthal / S.1127 Persaud).
- Establish parity for homeless recipients living in certain shelters, who currently receive only \$1.50 per day for basic needs (A.108 Rosenthal / S.113 Cleare).
- Better enable families to exit cash assistance prepared to cope with future economic setbacks (S.182 Persaud).
- Reduce barriers to accessing cash assistance by removing resource limits and expanding how much families can earn and still apply for benefits (A.4352 Rosenthal).
- Expand access to short-term emergency cash to cushion families facing economic shocks and setbacks.
- Create a state food benefit for households with children who are ineligible for SNAP based on citizenship status.

One-Time Cash Grants

- Expand the Child Tax Credit as recommended in the CPRAC recommendations. Specifically, increase the amount to \$1,500 for all children 0-17, ensure that any enhancement is permanent and indexed to inflation.
- Dedicate funds to support free tax filing to ensure New Yorkers are redeeming the credits they are eligible for (A.1883 Rosenthal).
- Improve and expand tax credits provided to families by delivering cash quarterly, and on a sliding scale based on income (A.3474 Hevesi / S.2082 Gounardes).

FPP urges the legislature to shift New York's cash support to be sufficient, reliable, respectful and responsive to intentionally build family well-being and protect against child welfare involvement.

Policy visions from Rise, YouthNPower and the Narrowing the Front Door to NYC's Child Welfare System Work Group have called for a shift toward unconditional cash support for families:

- Narrowing the Front Door: "Provide direct, unrestricted financial support to families and concrete resources in communities to ensure that all families can meet basic needs (such as, guaranteed income, cash transfers, child care, housing, etc.). Dedicate new investments to families and communities most impacted by the family regulation system and administer such investments independent of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). Shift flexible sources of federal, state and city funding to address concrete basic life necessities rather than for 'preventive services' designed for so-called 'at-risk' populations."
- YouthNPower: "Unconditional cash support is an emergent policy that holds great promise for young people leaving foster care. The data thus far from the YouthNPower direct cash transfer pilot identifies significant material need among young people who have recently left foster care. Unconditional cash support can address these immediate material needs and create the necessary conditions for young people to embrace work opportunities that suit their interests, and reduce future vulnerability to the child welfare system."
- Rise: "Parents call for well-resourced communities, including child care, jobs, housing, community centers and supports such as therapy. Parents want financial investment in families, access to information about their rights, non-judgmental and compassionate care, and care from people with similar experiences and backgrounds. Prioritize funding progressive forms of public assistance... such as no-strings-attached cash; accessible and quality food; affordable, quality housing; and free child care."

Recommendations in this testimony to shift toward unconditional cash for families—including investing in direct cash transfers, refundable tax credits and raising public assistance benefit levels while reducing conditions on assistance—would put New York at the forefront of investing in families.

Community Investment to Address Conditions of Poverty

Child and Family Wellbeing Fund

Research shows how everyday surroundings offer significant advantages to children even if their own family is struggling. Yet decades of redlining and racist disinvestment have resulted in vastly inequitable neighborhood conditions. The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund is a chance to make a corrective shift to ensure that all New York children live within neighborhoods that are set up to support their well-being.

New York State's "family policy guidelines" prioritize government support for families that promote "safe, nurturing environments which support the healthy growth of all family members." However, the current framework of CPS/child welfare intervention investigates and prosecutes families for "neglect"—allegations related to parental inability to provide basic necessities. The majority of reports to the state child abuse hotline are made not for abuse, but for symptoms of poverty (i.e., homelessness,

lack of transportation to school, inability to obtain medical care, lack of food and other basic needs, etc.). Parents earning low incomes are disproportionately reported to CPS for experiencing domestic violence or struggling with substance use, despite these situations impacting families regardless of socioeconomic status.

Many families who live in communities that have been disenfranchised and targeted by CPS are in survival mode, with limited trusted options for support. In fact, many state-funded resources available in communities are staffed by mandated reporters whose presence makes many families uncomfortable due to the implicit threat of child welfare involvement.

In response to these conditions, a group of statewide advocates with lived expertise in the child welfare system, research, policy and advocacy came together and developed a framework and proposal for community investment with state dollars. The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund redefines what “child welfare” means in New York by investing state dollars in local community-based organizations that provide families with basic necessities, and supporting formal and informal social structures that serve as enmeshed family and community protective factors, including material supports and mutual aid, doulas/maternal health, activities for children, and peer support groups.

Legislation creating a new Child and Family Wellbeing Fund would advance the health and development of all New York’s children by investing resources in communities that have been historically disenfranchised and targeted for government intervention through the CPS system. The Fund will resource community-driven initiatives and projects that strengthen families, reduce their vulnerability to CPS system contact, and promote family preservation, reunification, and healing.

Through its innovative, community-driven structure, the Fund will operate to increase necessary and beneficial resources for families in neighborhoods with high rates of CPS contact. As conceptualized by the Working Group, the Fund would invest \$30 million annually for 5 years during a pilot period, accessing state funding to build a sustainable infrastructure for community-directed investment in supporting and building capacity of small, grassroots organizations, projects, and initiatives. Established by New York law, the Fund would be an innovative approach to resourcing communities to support healthy children and families. The **Executive Budget** contains no language nor allocates any funds towards this essential investment in families.

The NYC Family Policy Project urges the legislature to:

- Establish the Child and Family Well-Being Fund for communities to use to support the needs of children and families (A.63 Hevesi)

Unconditional Cash Transfers / Guaranteed Income

Invest in Unconditional Cash Transfers to Build More Stable Households, Healthier Babies and Stronger Communities

For years, New York State has had one of the highest child poverty rates in the nation and a public benefits system that is difficult to navigate and does not lift families out of poverty. Statewide, almost 1 in 5 children lives with the instability and stress of poverty, compared to 1 in 8 families nationwide, with Rochester, Syracuse and Albany having some of the highest child poverty rates in the country.

In the “world’s wealthiest city,” a shameful 25 percent of children are living in poverty, which means that a family of three is earning under \$25,000 a year. Even with every form of additional assistance, from food stamps to housing vouchers, city families on benefits cannot break through the poverty line.

Half of New York City’s residents can’t actually afford to live there, and a family must be earning six figures to afford basic needs like food, shelter, transportation, and health care. Not to mention, these troubling trends disproportionately affect communities of color. This inequity is reflected in New York State’s significant disparities in maternal health outcomes across racial lines. In New York City, Black women are eight times more likely than white women to die from a pregnancy-related cause. New York simply cannot keep turning a blind eye to the horrific conditions new families are living in.

The prenatal-to-three period is one of, if not the most, important times in a child’s life. The conditions they grow up in during that time are critically important for a child’s future prospects, as they greatly affect their physical, mental, emotional, and social outcomes.

Research and evidence from the Bridge Project, the nation’s largest direct cash program for mothers and babies in New York—and five other states—makes clear that supporting new parents and their babies for sustained periods over the first few years of a baby’s life has the greatest impact on maternal and infant health and child and family well-being. This is supported additionally by evidence from dozens of U.S. and international programs as well. However, the little progress that has been made does not sufficiently address the need statewide.

The 2025 budget included an allocation of \$8.5 million for a BABY Benefit, which will provide a one-time benefit of \$1,800 to New Yorkers who get public assistance when they have a new baby. The **Executive Budget** contains no language nor allocates any funds to expand this benefit to include monthly payments, or extend its reach. Significant research supports the provision of recurring and unrestricted cash. As Dr. Vanessa Dor from The Bridge Project shares, ‘We start with the hypothesis that every mom’s situation is different. We have really learned that when you provide flexible cash, everyone can access what they actually need.’

The NYC Family Policy Project urges the legislature to:

- Provide direct and recurring cash assistance to income-eligible parents, for the last three months of pregnancy and first 18 months of a child’s life (A.1597 Clark / S.2132 Ramos).

Child Care

Expand Child Care, Launch Universal Child Care Pilots and Invest in Workforce Growth and Stability

Dozens of studies document that policies that protect against economic hardships, shocks and setbacks reduce investigations, maltreatment and family separation. On child care specifically:

- New York City's Universal pre-K was associated with a 7 to 23% reduction in investigation rates for neglect, and this effect was especially pronounced for New York City's Black and Latino children (Hong et al., 2025).
- An additional \$1,000 spent by states on child care assistance per person living in poverty is associated with a reduction of 40% in hotline calls, 35% in substantiated maltreatment, 63% in removals, 50% in child fatalities due to maltreatment (Puls et al., 2021).
- Each additional month that low-income mothers receive a child care subsidy is associated with a 16% decrease in the odds of a neglect report in the following 12 months (Yang et al., 2019).
- Children who attended Early Head Start had significantly fewer child welfare encounters between ages 5 and 9 than those who didn't attend and, if reported, were 93% less likely to enter foster care than children without early childhood education (Green et al., 2014).
- Waitlists to access subsidized child care are significantly associated with an increase in investigations (Klebens et al., 2015).
- For every additional child care concern reported by families receiving TANF, the risk of supervisory child neglect increases by 20% (Yang & Maguire-Jack, 2016).

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. Many zip codes across Broome, Monroe, Onondaga and other counties have investigation rates that are twice as high as even the highest impacted communities in the city, with 1 in 6 children experiencing an investigation each year. Expansion of child care options upstate and in NYC will also prevent needless state intrusion in families.

The **Executive Budget** allocates \$1.2 billion in new dollars for child care assistance and \$139 million for universal child care projects. Specifically, \$73 million for 2-Care in New York City, and \$66 million for services and expenses of Dutchess County, Monroe County, and Broome County for pilot projects to provide child care services to children aged zero to three.

As the Center for New York City Affairs shared, the current early care and education field's "low starting pay discourages prospective workers, who can earn comparable wages in retail or fast food jobs that don't require lengthy background checks or upfront, unpaid training." 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

The **Executive Budget** proposes no funding for compensation for the child care workforce. Child care educators, with an average annual salary of under \$38,000, earn under half as much as the median annual salary for full-time New York workers (of approximately \$68,000).⁴ A March 2023 survey of child care providers found that among 1,600 respondents, over 28,000 licensed or registered slots were left empty due to insufficient staffing because of low wages. Compensation for child care providers in New York must be updated in conjunction with expansions to child care.

Please see this report on this topic from New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, *Parity Compensation for New York’s Early Childhood Educators: Recognition and Respect for a Vital Profession*, [linked](#).

The NYC Family Policy Project urges the legislature to:

- Adopt the Governor’s proposal to expand pre-K and 3-K, fund the child care assistance program and launch universal child care pilots.
- Ensure pay parity for child care providers across center-based care and home care, and across community-based contractors and DOE employees.
- Ensure that pre-K 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.

Cash and Food Assistance

Increase Benefit Levels So Families Can Meet Basic Needs

Research is clear that families turn to cash assistance in times of deep hardship and emergency. In October 2024, more than 100,000 New York City families were enrolled in cash assistance for needed support, the highest it has been in almost 25 years.

New York state law is clear that financial inability to provide is not neglect. However, in practice, reports often align closely with the consequences of living in poverty. Research shows that material hardship is associated with CPS involvement beyond caregiver psychological distress and parenting factors (Yang, 2015), and the association of individual factors (such as substance abuse or mental health) with maltreatment is reduced after accounting for poverty (Escaravage, 2014), meaning poverty alone is a driving factor.

³ New York State Office of Children and Family Services. (n.d.). Child Care Data. <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/data/> from The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy.

⁴ [Universal High-Quality Child Care Requires Paying the Workforce a Thriving Wage](#)

Yet, cash assistance in New York City offers a maximum monthly benefit of just \$789 per month for a family of three. Far below any cost of living standard, this places families 41% below the federal poverty line, leaving families struggling to afford essentials like housing, food, toiletries and healthcare. Additionally, regulations require that more than half of the cash assistance families receive must be spent on utilities (\$53) and rent (\$400). The only flexible cash that families have is \$336 per month for a family of three—or about \$10 per day.

In 2022, almost 1 out of 5 New York City families receiving cash assistance experienced homelessness. Redlining and racism in housing mean that housing instability disproportionately affects families of color, and almost 90% of “heads of households” of families in shelter in New York City are Black or Latino. Shelter stays also increase exposure to child welfare. Typically, a quarter of families in shelters have been ACS-involved. Cash benefit amounts in New York City are further reduced for some families living in shelters, with these families receiving only \$189 per month for a family of three, or \$6 per day, making it even harder to make ends meet.

CPRAC’s recommendations to the governor include increasing the grant amount. Modeling of the impact of increasing the cash assistance grant shows that a 50% benefit increase would reduce child poverty statewide by 8% and a 100% increase would reduce child poverty by 18%.

Making a permanent investment in cash assistance grants will cost only \$328 million.⁵ It’s critical to redirect funds back toward cash assistance in order to strengthen economic security and mobility, protect family autonomy and integrity, and buffer families against setbacks and separation. Investing upstream in family health and wellbeing can reduce often traumatizing involvement with the child welfare system, as well as reduce high state spending on child welfare investigations and foster care. This shift can function as part of a larger strategy of repair and reinvestment for families and communities systematically excluded from economic power.

In the 2025 legislative session, a bill to establish parity for homeless recipients living in certain shelters was included in the Senate one-house budget proposal but not in the final budget. The **Executive Budget** contains no language nor allocates any funds to increase the benefit amount or to expand assistance to excluded families.

The NYC Family Policy Project urges the legislature to:

- Increase the benefit amount so families can meet their basic needs, lowering stress and increasing the time parents can spend with their children (A.106 Rosenthal / S.1127 Persaud). This would double the amount of the grant from \$389 for a family of three to approximately \$778 per month and ensure that it keeps pace with inflation.
- Establish parity for homeless recipients living in certain shelters, who currently receive only \$1.50 per day for basic needs (A.108 Rosenthal / S.113 Cleare). That amount hasn’t been updated since 1997. This bill would include certain shelter residents in grant raises tied to inflation.

⁵ Estimate provided by the Legal Aid Society.

Better Protect Savings So Families Can Cope with Future Economic Setbacks

To qualify for cash assistance in New York, families must hit rock bottom. A family of three cannot make more than \$9,468 per year (or \$789 per month) when applying, which is below the federal definition of “deep poverty.”

This low limit leaves many families— those making \$15,000 per year, for example—without relief from the cash benefits system. While ‘living in poverty’ by all measures, they can’t access cash support. This means that low-income families have little possibility of saving to protect against future setbacks.

In addition, a family of any size cannot have over \$2,500 in savings to be approved for assistance (or \$3,750 if a household member has a disability, or is 60 or older). Families have to be down to less than one month of reasonable rent in savings when they start the application process. They can’t keep money saved up to get through future tough times, like moving or having a medical emergency.

For families on cash assistance, requirements to continue receiving benefits also limit savings. A family of three, for example, can’t make more than \$29,640 per year and still receive cash support, yet this income level is still associated with experiencing significant hardships and minimal savings.

Research shows that, for low-income families with recently closed investigations, income “shocks” are associated with an 18% increased risk of subsequent investigation and 26% of a physical abuse investigation, while access to public assistance buffers against repeat involvement, especially when kids are 0-4 (12% lower risk of any investigation and 50% lower physical abuse investigation) (Cai, 2021).

The Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC) has made initial recommendations to expand income eligibility so that applicants would be able to make up to \$29,640 per year at time of application and still qualify for assistance, and to remove savings limits. Removing these barriers to savings could protect families against future economic shocks and setbacks, reducing child welfare involvement. The **Executive Budget** contains no language nor allocates any funds to protect families against future economic setbacks.

The NYC Family Policy Project urges the legislature to:

- Better enable families to exit cash assistance prepared to cope with future economic setbacks (S.182 Persaud). New York allows current recipients who start a new job, paid training, or work activity to continue receiving benefits for 6 months if they are making below 200% of the poverty line, which is \$51,640 for a family of three. This bill would expand eligibility to include recipients earning up to 400% of the poverty line, or \$103,280, helping recipients earn more and still receive support.
- Reduce barriers to accessing cash assistance by removing the \$2,500 resource limit and expanding how much families can earn—from \$9,468 to \$29,640 per year for a family of three—and still apply for benefits (A.4352 Rosenthal).

Protect and Expand Food Access for New York Families

Food insecurity is a serious challenge for New York families. Statewide, about one in seven New Yorkers—and one in five children—struggle to get enough food. In New York City, [this hardship is most acute](#), with almost one-third of children in the Bronx and more than 1 in 4 in Brooklyn experiencing food insecurity. Since 2019, food costs have [risen by 25% and pantry visits have increased by 82%](#). Food charities have faced [millions of dollars in funding cuts](#) from the federal government.

Between 2015 and 2019, SNAP had [lifted over half a million people above the poverty line in New York](#), including 200,000 children, each year. In the face of dire federal cuts, New York families will have to make impossible trade-offs between food and other essentials, increasing the likelihood of being unable to manage financial shocks.

When access to basic needs become unstable, the risk of unnecessary child welfare exposure grows (Slack, 2011). SNAP and WIC are protective:

- Children who participate in SNAP or WIC have a lower risk of substantiated reports than children who don't participate in either program (Lee, 2007)
- States that adopted generous SNAP policy options from 2004 to 2016 had lower rates of reports accepted for investigation, substantiations and foster care outcomes for all forms of child maltreatment and specifically for neglect (Johnson-Motoyama et al., 2022).
- States that expanded SNAP eligibility saw decreases in foster care entries (1.8 fewer entries per 1,000 children per year, on average), and these decreases were three times larger among Black children (Austin et al., 2023).

Beyond these protective effects, SNAP participation has been linked to more supportive parenting, such as reading with children or visiting libraries, especially in immigrant households (Berset et al., 2025).

The **Executive Budget** allocates funding towards nutrition programs through emergency food relief organizations and includes funding for chip-enabled EBT cards to prevent theft of SNAP benefits. It also includes an additional \$55 million for Healthy School Meals for All. FPP applauds these steps towards protecting New Yorkers from threats of hunger and disruptions in SNAP benefits.

To address federal threats, build a stronger safety net and keep families fed, FPP supports the priorities outlined by SNAP4All New York. We urge the legislature to consider establishing a food benefit to all income-eligible households currently ineligible for SNAP solely due to their immigration status. This program should begin its roll out by prioritizing groups facing urgent food needs, including those newly ineligible for SNAP due to status exclusions under H.R.1 and households with children who are currently ineligible for SNAP due to their immigration status, as recommended by CPRAC.

Additionally, despite the significant increase in participation, local WIC agencies have remained nearly flat-funded for a decade. Many agencies are operating far above their contracted caseloads and struggling to serve all eligible families who are seeking services. An estimated 200,000 New Yorkers are

eligible for WIC but not enrolled, a missed opportunity to maximize federally funded food assistance amid rising food insecurity and an ongoing affordability crisis.

The NYC Family Policy Project urges the legislature to:

- Secure a State investment to provide food benefits to all income-eligible New Yorkers who are excluded from SNAP due to their immigration status.
- Include \$30 million in funding to help WIC programs meet increased need and serve more children and families.

Minimize Barriers to Cash for New York Families, Especially in Times of Emergency

Many of the recommendations outlined in this testimony are the subject of existing bills that would have a profound impact on reducing poverty and addressing community conditions that compound poverty. However, as legislators move to increase cash support for families, it is important to consider the way assistance is delivered. Evidence from dozens of studies shows that families benefit in unique ways when cash support is significant enough to cover basic needs; is provided in ways that are dependable and aren't time-consuming and shaming; and can be accessed in difficult times.

Administrative burdens and regulations can make it difficult to find out about, apply for and be approved for benefits. Families that spoke with FPP shared the stresses of uncertainty, stigma and discomfort—especially the feeling of being at the mercy of the system—that can arise when interacting with the cash assistance system.

Once enrolled in benefits, confusing rules on income limits and work requirements also contribute to families' uncertainty about whether they have to say no to a promotion or a raise to maintain benefits access. The legislature can play a significant role in reducing the uncertainty families feel about income limits and benefits cliffs, making it easier for parents to plan ahead to achieve long-term goals of more secure, well-paying work.

Short-term TANF benefits could be also used to address family economic stresses closely tied to child welfare involvement, such as the diagnosis of a significant child behavioral health issue or unexpected significant parent or child hospital stay. Professionals such as hospital staff or school social workers could be trained to refer families for support. A pilot program to test the effects of emergency cash support for significant family stressors can illuminate a potential pathway to reduce child welfare involvement.

Currently in New York, most emergency assistance requires the same application and eligibility as applying for the full TANF benefit, but this short-term benefit could be targeted to families living under 200% of the poverty line, with a simple application. Reducing barriers could offer significant protection to families during setbacks, potentially helping offset the savings gap that impacts Black and Latino families. In 2021, 14% of all households and 32% of Black households in New York had zero or negative savings, and half of Black and Latino families didn't have enough cash to cover their basic needs for three

months if they stopped earning money. If successful, deploying short-term benefits to address family stressors could help reduce racial disparities in child welfare involvement.

Please see this report on this topic from FPWA, *Caught in the Gaps*, [linked](#).

The NYC Family Policy Project urges the legislature to:

- Reduce uncertainty and address unnecessary shaming interactions so families can access cash support and plan ahead. Specifically:
 - Ensure OTDA implementation of CRPAC recommendations to improve experience of system interaction. CPRAC recommends adjustments that would increase the reliability of cash assistance and reduce shaming interactions. These include simplifying and streamlining the cash assistance application process and continuing to explore how to improve how public benefit delivery is experienced by recipients.
 - Require the CPRAC to further understand and apply fiscal values to the changes they recommended in 2024 to improve benefit delivery.
- Explore expanded and flexible uses of short-term benefits to address family stressors tied to child welfare involvement. Specifically:
 - Include additional categories of eligibility emergency cash, including economic shocks that research has linked to child welfare involvement.
 - Reserve funds for pilots using TANF reserve dollars that support learning on the effects of short-term emergency cash on preventing child welfare involvement.

One-Time Cash Grants

Expand Child Tax Credit to \$1,500 and Cover all Children in Line with CPRAC Recommendation

New Yorkers are struggling with the high cost of living. The costs of housing, child care, utilities, and basic living needs have put many families in financial crisis. By making changes to our tax code, New York can give economically burdened workers and families the means to pay for what they need—food, rent, utilities, child care, and more. Tax credits that function as a savings jolt on an annual basis are promising ways to bolster family income, allowing families to access big ticket items, like appliances or summer camp payments.

Research has found that states with refundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), compared to those without, had 11% fewer entries into foster care even after controlling for poverty, race, education and unemployment. (Rostad, 2020). A 10% increase in refundable state EITC benefits is associated with a 5% decline in any reported maltreatment and 9% decline in reported neglect (Kovsi, 2021). And finally, \$1,000 increase in income via EITC is associated with 8–10% reduction in self-reported CPS involvement for low-income single-mother household (Berger, 2017).

In 2025, New York expanded the ESCC, increasing the maximum credit amount to \$1,000 per child under four and \$500 per child ages four to sixteen. With regards to the EITC, immigrant New Yorkers who file

using an ITIN and young childless adults who would benefit from the credit remain excluded. The **Executive Budget** proposes a “whole-of-government approach” to ensuring that eligible New Yorkers access the full credit. While FPP is in support of this intention, further expansion of tax credits in amount and eligibility can protect New Yorkers from significant income shocks as a result of federal cuts.

The NYC Family Policy Project urges the legislature to:

- Dedicate funds to support free tax filing to ensure New Yorkers are redeeming the credits they are eligible for (A.1883 Rosenthal).
- Improve and expand tax credits provided to families by delivering cash quarterly, and on a sliding scale based on income (A.3474 Hevesi / S.2082 Gounardes).
- Expand the Child Tax Credit as recommended in the CPRAC recommendations. Specifically, increase the amount to \$1,500 for all children 0-17, ensure that any enhancement is permanent and indexed to inflation.