



**Testimony for the
Joint Legislative Hearing on the
State Fiscal Year 2026-27 Executive Budget Proposal**

Human Services

Testimony of Juan Diaz

Policy Manager

Jdiaz@childrensdefense.org

And

Sabah Merchant

Senior Policy Associate

Smerchant@childrensdefense.org

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Children’s Defense Fund – New York (CDF-NY) thanks Chair Pretlow and Chair Krueger, as well as 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 to respond to Governor Hochul’s FY27 Executive Budget.

About the Children’s Defense Fund

Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) is the only national, multi-issue advocacy organization working at the intersection of child well-being and racial justice by wielding the moral authority of programmatic proximity and community organizing to inform public policy. CDF serves and advocates for the largest, most diverse generation in America: the 74 million children and youth under the age of 18 and 30 million young adults under the age of 25, with particular attention to those living in poverty and communities of color. We partner with policymakers, aligned organizations, and funders to serve children, youth, and young adults. As the New York State office of the Children’s Defense Fund, we focus our statewide movement-building and policy work on economic mobility, health equity, child welfare, youth justice, and racial justice/immigrant rights.

The Impact of Child Poverty in New York State

New York State continues to have one of the highest children's poverty rates in the nation at 18 percent, more specifically 1 in 5 children.¹ In New York City, child poverty disproportionately impacts immigrant and children of color.² Moreover, in cities like Rochester and Buffalo child poverty is almost 50 percent, with African American and Hispanic children being disproportionately impacted.³ Housing insecurity remains an issue that predominantly impacts children, for instance in New York City about 154,000 public school students were homeless in 2024.⁴ The evolving Federal immigration enforcement has increased fear and stigma statewide, especially for close to 40 percent of New York children and youth who have at least one immigrant parent.⁵ These facts are clear indications that the New York government must do more for low-income and vulnerable families with children statewide.

Call to Action

¹ See 2025 State of New York’s Children Data Book and Briefing | Schuyler Center [2025 State of New York’s Children Data Book and Briefing | Schuyler Center](#)

² See 5 Annual Report: The State of Poverty and Disadvantage in NYC Vol. 7 [Annual Report: The State of Poverty and Disadvantage in NYC Vol. 7](#)

³ See Nearly half of all children in Rochester live in poverty, second-highest rate in the nation | RochesterFirst [Nearly half of all children in Rochester live in poverty, second-highest rate in the nation | RochesterFirst](#)

⁴ See 154,000 NYC students were homeless last school year, another record high [154,000 NYC students were homeless last school year - Chalkbeat](#)

⁵ See 2025 State of New York’s Children Data Book and Briefing | Schuyler Center [2025 State of New York’s Children Data Book and Briefing | Schuyler Center](#)

Federal disinvestments, eligibility restrictions, the high cost of living, and the evolving Federal immigration enforcement are having damaging effects on children and youth statewide. As such, the New York State government has the moral obligation to uplift the most vulnerable families with children, regardless of immigration status. We thank the Legislature for their work; however, far more investments are imperative to help New York children and youth, regardless of immigration status to fulfil their potential and thrive.

CDF-NY therefore urges the Legislature to work with the Governor and allocate the necessary funding in the FY2026-2027 Budget, to uplift New York vulnerable children and youth, regardless of immigration status. Below are fiscal priorities that CDF-NY and partner organizations support in the following areas; housing, child tax credit, food security, immigration, health, child welfare and youth justice.

Housing

- **We urge the Legislature to support the allocation of \$250 million to fully fund the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP).** To support low-income New Yorkers at risk of homelessness or eviction. The current \$50 million funding allocation is a first step in the right direction; however, the current housing crisis calls for an investment that can significantly reduce homelessness statewide.

Tax Credits

- **Increase 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; and index the credit to inflation so that families continue to receive the full value of the credit. Child tax credits have proven to be an effective investment in significantly reducing child poverty.
- **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.

Food Security

- **Invest \$244 million to create a state-funded food benefit program for income-eligible New Yorkers currently excluded from SNAP based on their immigration status.** Far too many U.S. citizen children from mixed status households will struggle with food insecurity without this investment.
- **Support funding to improve technology for EBT benefit cards to prevent SNAP theft.** Create a fund to replace stolen SNAP benefits retroactively from December 2024

and until EBT upgrade is complete. Thousands of New Yorkers have lost millions of dollars in SNAP benefits due to EBT card theft.

- **Fund Nourish NY at \$75 million and Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) at \$75 million** to help New York’s emergency food systems meet increasing food supports demand and federal disinvestments.

Immigration

- **We urge the Legislature to support \$175 million investment in FY27 to expand and stabilize immigration legal and social services across New York State.** Last year’s investment was an important investment, but much more needs to be allocated to support immigrant households and prevent family separation.
- **CDF-NY supports \$100 million in funding for the [Access to Representation Act](#), A270 (Cruz),** which ensures a right to counsel for all immigrants facing deportation in New York and provides stable funding for immigration legal services.
- **We urge the Legislature to continue advocating for the passage of [New York for All](#), S2235A (Gounardes) / A3506 (Reyes).** New York for All would limit state and local government agencies from conducting immigration enforcement and colluding with Federal immigration enforcement agencies. New York for All is an investment for all New Yorkers.

Mental Health

Nearly 90% of brain development occurs before age three, when early intervention is most effective at shaping healthy developmental trajectories. New York’s Early Intervention system is failing to deliver timely services to thousands of children and young people with developmental delays, undermining their legal rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) Part C and jeopardizing long-term educational, social, and economic outcomes. Thousands of families across the state cannot access the type of care they need, even if they have behavioral health coverage, and thousands of families are on a waitlist to access these essential services.⁶

- For-profit commercial plans are collecting high premiums from families, yet failing to provide needed services, and State Medicaid often ends up covering the cost of this care. **We urge the Legislature to invest \$200 million of Medicaid funding to address the waitlist crisis facing children and families.** ⁷

⁶ See <https://thechildrensagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/2025-Report-on-Early-Intervention-Reform-FINAL-October-9-2025.pdf>

⁷ See <https://cccnewyork.org/urging-ny-state-leaders-to-take-care-of-the-workforce-that-cares-for-our-children/>

- We strongly urge New York State to undertake a thorough study of how its Early Intervention program can be better structured and executed to serve the needs of children and families and implement the 5% reimbursement rate increase, as promised by the **EI Reform bill, A283A (Paulin)/S1222A (Rivera)**.⁸

Child Welfare

Many families who live in communities that have been disenfranchised and targeted by Child Protective Services (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. The [Child and Family Wellbeing Fund](#) would support children's growth and development by investing resources in communities that have been historically disenfranchised and targeted for government intervention through the CPS / child welfare system.

- **We therefore urge the Legislature to advocate for an investment of \$30 million** to support local grant-making to grassroots organizations that build community ties, promote child health and enhance family resilience. It would also establish pathways for families to help shape how dollars are spent through neighborhood asset-mapping and local decision-making grants.

Youth Justice

Since Raise the Age (RTA) went into effect in 2019, New York has seen a significant decline in youth arrests. Indeed, over the ten-year period from 2015 to 2024, arrests of youth for low-level offenses and for more serious offenses have decreased by over 50%, both in New York City and throughout the rest of the State.⁹ This success is striking on its own but is even more remarkable considering the State's failure to fully implement the legislation. According to a report by the Comptroller, of the \$1.71 billion appropriated statewide to facilitate implementation of the RTA legislation, only approximately a third—\$658.8 million—has been spent, with less than 20% going to the community-based programs and services we know work.¹⁰ The current funding mechanism, which distributes funds through a county plan process, means that community-based organizations cannot access RTA funds directly, creating often insurmountable barriers for the very programs and services the RTA funds were intended to support.¹¹

To fully realize the promise of RTA, New York must ensure that State funding goes to the community-based organizations that can meet youth where they are.

⁸ See <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/A283/amendment/A>

⁹ See Protect RTA-NY, <https://raisetheagency.org/>.

¹⁰ See N.Y. State Comptroller, "Spending on Raise the Age Programs in New York," May 2025, available at <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/spending-on-raise-the-age-programs-in-new-york.pdf>.

¹¹ *Id.*

- The [Youth Justice Innovation Fund](#), A8491 (Hevesi) / S643 (Cleare), would do just that. Building on the success of efforts like Project RISE,¹² the Innovation Fund would direct \$50 million of the annual \$250 million RTA appropriation to community-based organizations to provide a continuum of services from prevention and early intervention to alternatives to detention/incarceration/placement for youth aged 12 through 25. Such programs and services have been shown to be effective (and cost effective) at reducing youth contact with the criminal legal system.¹³

We thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and look forward to collaborating to improve the overall well-being of New York's children and youth.

¹² See Press Release, "Governor Hochul Announces \$28 Million to Combat Gun Violence, Increase Opportunity for Youth and Strengthen Public Safety in Seven Cities Across New York State," Oct. 24, 2022, available at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-28-million-combat-gun-violence-increase-opportunity-youth-and>.

¹³ See The Sentencing Project, "Effective Alternatives to Youth Incarceration," June 2023, available at <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2023/06/Effective-Alternatives-to-Youth-Incarceration.pdf>.