



## **Proposed Budget Cuts Weaken Safety Net for Children and Families**

### ***Cuts to preventive services, foster care, kinship and adoption programs undermine path to recovery from COVID-19 crisis***

January 29, 2021. The New York State Child Welfare Coalition, made up of policy advocates working to improve child welfare outcomes for children and families, is alarmed by the Governor's proposed budget, most notably millions of dollars in cuts to a variety of programs that promote family stability and child safety. ***We call on the Governor and the Legislature to restore these funds and refuse to balance the State budget on the backs of vulnerable children and families.***

Local Departments of Social Services have already endured months of financial withholding from the State, which has impacted their ability to support children and families across New York. In the face of widespread economic hardship, and the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black and Latinx communities, this is the wrong time to lock-in cuts to State support for critical child welfare programs for the difficult year ahead.

Last spring and summer, 4,200 of New York's children lost a parent or guardian to COVID-19—that is one out of every 1,000 children. And, 325,000 children were pushed into poverty. Black and Latinx children experienced the death of a parent or caregiver at twice the rate of white children.<sup>1</sup> Today, as we face a second wave of COVID-19, and the sustained stress that the last year has wrought on families, we cannot divest from the minimum supports that communities need.

The Governor's budget cuts:

- child welfare preventive services that promote family stability; 5% cuts to reimbursement would affect every county, a reduction of \$30.5 million;
- kinship care programs that help family members care for children by 5%;
- adoption subsidies that enable children to leave foster care by 5%, a reduction of \$9.4 million; and
- community-based programs to prevent children from entering the child welfare and juvenile justice systems by \$4 million (an overall reduction of 20%).

Cutting the reimbursement that counties rely upon to serve children and families is something we have seen before. In 2008, the State reduced its support for child welfare preventive services from the statutorily set 65% to 62%, based on similar "capped" funding as part of state-wide austerity measures. Despite the law stating otherwise, the State never returned to meeting its commitment to pay its fair share under the law, even during New York's economic strength before the COVID-19 pandemic. We cannot permit the FY2022 budget to continue to whittle away at State support for these essential family supports.

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<sup>1</sup> United Hospital Fund, *COVID-19 Ripple Effect: The Impact of COVID-19 on Children in New York State*, September 2020.

These cuts are inconsistent with the State's preparation for federal Family First Prevention Services Act implementation, which is included in the Governor's proposed budget. Under the new federal law, states like New York have financial incentives for investing in family stability supports and reducing the need to remove children from their homes.

"As New York strives to Build Back Better, we *must* prioritize the needs of children and families—especially Black and Latinx communities hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and over-represented in the child welfare system. Budgets are moral documents, and this is the wrong time to cut State support for the child welfare services that our children and families need now." Kimberley Chin, Acting Executive Director, Children's Defense Fund-New York

"COVID-19 has brought into high relief what we have long known: for children to thrive, they need a strong family and systems that are aligned, coordinated, and well-resourced. With Family First implementation around the corner, the urgent need to address racial disparity in child welfare, and another wave of rising COVID-19 cases, now is the time to support families in crisis, not pull the rug out from under them." Kate Breslin, President and CEO, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

"The foundation of a strong New York State is our people, and strong people are built by strong families. New York's families need the state's support this year more than ever. The Governor and Legislature need to invest, not divest, in these services that keep children safe, ensure child well-being, and give families the tools to survive this time of crisis and thrive in the future." Jim Purcell, President and CEO, Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies

"Throughout the pandemic, child welfare programs have been a lifeline for New York's children and families responding to heightened food and housing insecurity, barriers to remote learning and increased health and behavioral health needs," said Jennifer March, Executive Director of Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. "Investments in children and families now are the key to New York's recovery. We are calling on Governor Cuomo to ensure that already-suffering New Yorkers do not lose access to the services and supports they rely on."

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