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Human Services
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Good afternoon. My name is Raysa S. Rodriguez and I am the Associate Executive Director for Policy and Advocacy at the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. CCC is a 75-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. 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.

I would like to thank Chair Weinstein, Chair Krueger and all the members of the Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees for holding today's hearing on the human services proposals in the Governor's Executive Budget for the State Fiscal Year 2022.

This year has been unlike any other for New York's children and families. Disrupted education, job loss, housing instability, food insecurity, and the immense loss of life from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as heightened health and behavioral health needs have all negatively impacted children's well-being. Amongst these unprecedented challenges, the obstacles and inequities already prevalent in New York have been exacerbated, revealing profound disparities and long-unaddressed needs that require significant action and investment. Austerity measures at the state and local level will only worsen the effects of the pandemic, particularly on children from Black, Latinx, and immigrant households and prevent a full recovery. Now is the time to protect funding for child and family supports and to invest in our children to ensure they not only recover from this crisis but thrive. To that end, we must not only advocate at the federal level for direct state and municipal aid and support for essential programming, but must also be bold in our pursuit of state tax policy and revenue proposals.

Child and Family Well-Being in New York State

Earlier this year, CCC published a Child and Family Well-being Index for New York State. The analysis examined data for New York State's 62 counties across six domains of child and family well-being—Economic Security, Housing, Health, Education, Youth, and Family & Community.

In the Economic Security domain, CCC found that despite high labor force participation rates for families with children in many counties, child poverty is disturbingly high across the state. A total of 835,815 children statewide live in households below the Federal Poverty Level. Of the

62 counties in New York State, about a third have child poverty rates greater than the NYS average (20.6%) and yet more than 90% of families with children in nearly all of these counties have one or both parents in the labor force.

In the Housing domain, CCC found in New York State 43% of the population are renters, and 27% of NYS households are severely rent burdened, affecting an estimated 915,370 New Yorkers. In total, 26 out of 62 counties have more than a quarter of households spending more than half their income on rent, and in eight counties more than 30% of households are severely rent burdened.

Sadly, most counties also struggle with early education enrollment. In 33 counties, fewer than 50% of 3 and 4-year-olds are enrolled in public or private early education programs. Most counties (50) have early education enrollment rates lower than the state average of 58.6%, and 23 counties fall behind the national average of 47.9%.

In the Family & Community domain, CCC found that more than a quarter of children in 51 counties across the state live in households headed by a single parent. Nationwide, 30% of children live in households headed by a single parent, in New York 42 counties exceed this national average. In 36 counties, more than 10% of adults do not have a high school degree, with eight counties exceeding the state average of 13.5%.¹

Our recommendations that follow for the state's FY 2022 budget are aimed at addressing these challenges head on. As we consider the pandemic's impact on child and family needs, these data point to the need to protect against cuts to critical human services and family supports, and increase state commitments to anti-poverty measures, child care, housing assistance, and child welfare.

Early Childhood Education

More than ever, the health, educational, and social benefits of high-quality early childhood education are needed for young children in our current moment. In addition to the vital role it plays in child development, early care and education is also crucial to economic recovery and supporting working families. According to a U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, 1 in 5 NY adults aged 25 to 44 - including 1 in 4 women - report child care responsibilities as the primary reason for being out of work.² To keep caregivers in the workforce or to help them return to the workforce, as well as to provide developmental support for children, we must focus on ensuring that child care is and continues to be high-quality and accessible for New York's children and families.

¹ Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. "Child & Family Well-being in New York State: Ranking Risks Across 62 Counties." January 2021. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cccnewyork.org/2021/01/CCC-2021-Child-and-Family-Well-Being-in-New-York-State.pdf>.

² CCC analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, Public Use Files April 23 - July 21, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products/household-pulse-survey.html>.

CCC was pleased to see the Governor address child care in his State of the State presentation and supports the \$40 million in the executive budget to lower some family co-pays. But right now, New York state has a unique opportunity to make building-block investments and long-term structural changes to its child care system. New York is set to receive approximately \$450 million dollars from the December 2020 federal stimulus act, and that money can and should be used to dramatically expand access to child care and child care subsidies across the state. CCC, along with its partners in the Empire State Campaign for Child Care, urge the legislature to use the federal funds and raise state revenue as necessary, to do the following.

1. Provide counties with \$370 million to make the child care subsidy system more equitable by eliminating unfair eligibility variations across counties and communities, and prioritizing all income-eligible families who are unemployed and seeking work, retraining, or pursuing higher education; families involved in domestic violence; families receiving preventive child welfare services; foster families; families experiencing homelessness; and children with special needs.
2. Incrementally expand subsidy eligibility to at least 85% of the state median income (beginning with regions with a high cost of living and/or those hit hard by the impacts of the pandemic).
3. Reduce parent co-pays to no more than 10% of income over the federal poverty level in counties that are currently above that level as a step toward ensuring that one day, no New York family pays more than 7% of income for child care; and
4. Pay subsidy to providers for at least 12 absences/quarter per child, plus federal holidays, building toward a system in which subsidy is not paid based on a child's daily attendance, but based on enrollment;
5. Commit to eliminating expulsions and suspensions in child care and pre-K, which disproportionately impact children of color, by setting a statewide prohibition on suspensions and expulsions (in most cases) while investing at least \$15 million to infant-toddler resource centers to provide child care and pre-K programs the supports they need to meet the developmental, mental health, social-emotional needs of all the children in their care, and;
6. Invest \$100 million to create a fund to increase workforce compensation to a fair wage and improve child care quality. Priority should be given to programs that serve low-income families and care for infants and toddlers.

Additionally, as federal child care funds from last year's federal CARES Act continue to be made available, the state should continue to provide child care scholarships and subsidies to essential workers, and stabilization grants to child care providers for the duration of the pandemic. But notably, to meet provider needs, these grants must be paid out as up-front grants, rather than reimbursements, paid out periodically, and be made available to all providers, with the amount determined based on region and modality of care.

It is also past time that the Governor live up to his previous commitments and create statewide universal full-day pre-K for all of New York's 4-year-olds. CCC urges the legislature to invest the full \$770 million to create access to quality full-day pre-K for the 77,000 4-year-olds in districts outside New York City who currently lack access. This would include enhanced rates to meet quality standards, and an additional 20% set aside to support highly qualified and

appropriately compensated teachers in both community programs and public schools. Additionally, \$5 million should be invested to establish Regional Technical Assistance Centers to support the roll-out of quality early childhood education, to support districts without dedicated early childhood coordinators, and to strengthen collaboration and partnerships between public schools and early childhood programs in the community.

Child Welfare

The heightened needs and economic insecurity New York families are experiencing as a result of this historic downturn undoubtedly compromises child safety and well-being. In 2019, more than two-thirds 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. 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 7,804 children in the foster care system in 2019.

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

To truly protect New York's children, now is the time to prioritize investments in services proven to maintain child safety and keep families stable and together. CCC and its child welfare partners strongly oppose the Governor's proposed cuts to critical child welfare services including:

- 5% cut in reimbursement to localities for child welfare preventive services (\$30.5 million); reduces state match for prevention expenses to 59/41 state and local share.
- 5% cut to kinship care funding.
- 5% reduction in adoption subsidies (\$9.4 million)
- 20% reduction (\$4 million) to programs that prevent child welfare and juvenile justice systems involvement.
- \$11.2 million cut to Foster Care Block Grant.

CCC urges the legislature to restore these cuts during budget negotiations and ensure critical child welfare services are held harmless from austerity measures.

Housing

The COVID-19 pandemic and economic collapse has had a devastating and disproportionate impact on communities that were already grappling with housing instability and high risks of family

homelessness including poverty, unemployment, overcrowded housing, severe rent-burden, and high numbers of families entering shelter. While the eviction moratorium has prevented a surge in the number of families in family shelter, robust investments will be necessary for a statewide recovery including support for rent arrear funds, a statewide rent subsidies, and continued investments to preserve and construct affordable housing in New York, with particular attention to the needs of families.

CCC is pleased to see the Governor's FY'222 proposed budget prioritizes investments to mitigate escalating risks to housing stability including:

- \$250 million for supportive housing, including family supportive housing.
- \$128 million in Homelessness Housing and Assistance Programs (HHAP) towards critical housing and shelter capital.
- Elimination of TANF cost shifts that negatively impact localities ability to deliver critical homeless services.
- An estimated \$1.3 billion of federal stimulus resources toward rental assistance allocated to the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance (OTDA).
- Protection of supportive housing and housing prevention programs from the across the board 5% cut to human services.

However, the proposed budget fails to include several investments for a full recovery. CCC urges the Governor and legislature to ensure the final budget includes key investments to meaningfully secure housing for families with children including a commitment towards a statewide rent subsidy, and a critical expansion and streamlining of eligibility for existing rental assistance (e.g. waiving eviction requirement for eligibility, raising rent ceilings, and waiving repayment of critical one-shot deals).

Youth Justice

New York State has made significant progress in the fight toward youth justice and implementation of critical reforms brought by the Raise the Age legislation. However, more work is ahead of us to end the criminalization of children and better serve children and youth that come into contact with law enforcement and the court system. CCC and its youth justice partners are encouraged to see plans to close four youth facilities. CCC has long fought against institutionalization of children and youth and against facilities that are developmentally inappropriate. Shutting down youth facilities is an important step in the right direction towards youth justice and the fight towards racial justice as well. However, CCC and its partners strongly encourage the Executive and Legislative branches to include a plan in the final budget to reinvest savings associated with facilities closures (approximately \$21 million in operational funding alone) into communities where youth face the most risk for justice system involvement.

In addition, CCC also supports the continued investments of \$250 million for statewide Raise the Age implementation although for another consecutive year, New York City **will not receive any** reimbursement for expenses associated with raising the age of criminal responsibility just as other counties have since passage of the Raise the Age legislation despite the fiscal climate the city currently finds itself in.

However, the proposed budget also includes cuts to youth programs during a time when they are needed most. CCC and its youth justice partners oppose the following cuts and urge the Legislature to restore them during budget negotiations:

- \$4 million resulting from consolidating two critical funding streams: Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS) and Supervision and Treatment Services for Juveniles Program (20% reduction)
- 5% cuts in State funding for costs associated with placement and detention increasing costs on localities
- Proposed shift to a utilization model from a capacity model compromising critical staffing, programs and services at the core of Raise the Age implementation

Finally, to build on RTANY we would encourage advancing the following pieces of legislation:

- **Raising the Lower Age of Delinquency Bill Intro-ed by Sen. Bailey (S4051)** Under current law, children as young as 7 years old may be arrested and prosecuted as juvenile delinquents in Family Court. Children under 12 may be subject to police questioning, pre-trial detention with older youth, probation, and mandatory confinement. Raising the age from age 7 to 12 would better serve elementary school-age children who come into contact with law enforcement through community-based services, including those available through local departments of social services and behavioral health care. This legislation would result in better child outcomes and safer communities.
- **Strengthen and Expand Protections for Court Involved Youth Up to Age 25** Based on research on emerging adulthood and brain development, we know that brain development continues into the mid-20s. New York’s Youthful Offender law provides the opportunity for youth *under* the age of 19 to have a criminal conviction set aside and replaced with a confidential, non-criminal adjudication. It also allows for reduced prison sentences. Yet, at age 19, this critical protection is no longer available and young people face mandatory prison sentences and lifelong criminal records that create barriers to education, jobs, and housing for youthful mistakes. New York should strengthen existing protections under the youthful offender law and create a new “Young Adult” status for youth up to age 25.

Child Poverty

As noted above, economic insecurity is felt by households in too many counties statewide. With a total of 835,815 children statewide living in poverty, there is no better time for New York to be bold in its commitment to reduce child poverty across the state. The experience of poverty has long-term impacts on child development and well-being. Trauma due to insecurity in childhood can have effects on brain development, health and growth trajectory.

CCC and its partners urge the Legislature to pass the Child Poverty Reduction Act S.2755 (Ramos)/ A.1160 (Bronson) in the one-house budget bill. S.2755/A.1160 provides New York the tools needed to reduce child poverty. It requires New York to make a public commitment to cutting child poverty in half by 2030; requires an annual public report of the effects that any adjustment or reduction by the director of the budget will have on child poverty; establishes the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council to develop a plan to achieve this goal; requires regular reporting to hold government to account; and directs the Advisory Council to evaluate policies proven to sharply cut child poverty. Among the most promising proposals we urge advancement of include:

- Strengthening and expanding New York's Earned Income Tax Credit;
- Expanding and strengthening New York's child tax credit esp. to include young children
- Expanding work training and employment programs
- Increasing access to subsidized housing vouchers
- Expanding access to subsidized child care

Cost-Shifts to NYC

The Executive Budget also contains several proposals that would result in significant and permanent cost-shifts from the state to New York City. These cost shifts will have a detrimental impact on the health and human services as well as education system ability to respond to increases needs. In terms of troubling human service proposals, the budget includes an

The aforementioned 5% cut in reimbursement to localities for child welfare preventive services also reduces the state's match for prevention expenses and would result in a cost-shift to NYC totaling more than \$30.5 million.

We ask the Legislature to reject these proposals, and ensure the State continues to support New York City, its children and its families.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare and exacerbated existing inequities that touch every facet of child, family and community life. Disparity is present in income and employment, housing, health and behavioral health care, the digital divide, and early care and education, and new challenges and profound barriers to well-being have been created. Yet, the Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2022 does little to address these issues. There is no mistake, federal aid must be aggressively advocated for and state tax policy and revenue options must be boldly pursued. It is by supporting early care, child welfare preventive services, anti-poverty measures, youth justice reforms, and delivering federal funds while avoiding cost-shifts to localities, that New York State can begin to help its children and their families recover from this crisis and set them up for long-term success.