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Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
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Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through civic engagement, research, and advocacy. 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.

We would like to thank Chair Ayala, Chair Brannan, and all the members of the City Council General Welfare and Finance Committees for holding today's important hearing on the Mayor's FY26 Executive Budget. Below we uplift recommendations for how to improve the delivery of essential services for NYC families and children across the following areas:

- **Address Family Homelessness**
 - Improve eviction prevention and aftercare
 - Expedite housing placements
 - Improve education continuity
- **Combat Poverty and Food Insecurity**
 - Enhance financial security for youth and families
 - Invest in anti-hunger programs
- **Enhance Services for Systems-Involved Youth and Families**
 - Restore Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and supportive programming for youth and young adults
 - Invest in child welfare primary prevention and workforce stability
 - Enhance supports for immigrant youth and families

Address Family Homelessness

The current housing and shelter crisis calls for bold actions and enhanced funding to reduce housing instability for families with children. The most recent [CCC's Keeping Track of New York City's Children](#) book revealed that in 2023, 30% of NYC renters pay at least half of their income towards rent, and one in three renter households with children are living in overcrowded conditions. Additionally, there were more than 12,000 residential evictions in 2023, and more than 46,600 children reside in the NYC shelter system.ⁱ

CCC is a steering committee member of the Family Homeless Coalition (FHC), a coalition comprised of 20 organizations representing service and housing providers, children's advocacy organizations, and people with lived experience with family homelessness. We are united by the goal of preventing family homelessness, improving the well-being of children and families in shelter, and supporting the long-term stability of families with children who leave shelter. CCC supports [FHC's 2025 Policy Agenda](#). Below we uplift a number of the critical investments and policy changes that are needed to prevent homelessness and support families struggling with housing instability.

Improve Eviction Prevention and Aftercare

- **Oppose the Administration's proposed rule change that would raise the household contribution for CityFHEPS families with earned income from 30% to 40% of their income when renewing beyond Year 5 for “good cause.”** This policy would force families to pay a higher proportion of their income towards rent amid a citywide affordability crisis, threatening the housing stability and self-sufficiency of families and increasing the risk of homelessness.
- **Increase the budget for Homebase by \$37.9 million to a total of \$100 million.** In recent years, Homebase providers have taken on tremendous increases in caseload as well as an ever-expanding set of responsibilities, including submitting CityFHEPS applications, renewals, transfer requests and rent portion adjustment requests. This has not been accompanied by funding levels to match the new post-Covid reality. Additionally, Homebase provides public benefits screening, legal assistance, education and employment training for low-income communities.
- **Restore and increase rental assistance funding.** The FY26 Preliminary Budget included a \$325 million funding reduction to rental assistance. We urge the City Council to not only advocate for restoration of rental assistance funding, but to significantly enhance this much needed assistance. Many households must apply for emergency rental assistance to preserve their apartments and prevent eviction. Anticipated Federal budget cuts will have a severe impact on emergency rental assistance for families facing evictions and further underscore the importance of city investments.

Expedite Housing Placements

- **Implement the CityFHEPS Expansion and Reforms Passed into Law in 2023.** The series of reforms and changes to CityFHEPS passed into law in 2023 are now in legal limbo. We urge implementation of these important changes as a means to increase housing stability and reduce homelessness for more families citywide.
- **Adequately Fund the City Commission on Human Rights to Enforce SOI Discrimination.** We support \$4 million in additional funding for CCHR to a total agency budget of around \$18 million. This will help bring CCHR staffing back to 2019 levels and allow for greater enforcement of Source of Income Discrimination laws and implementation of new Fair Chance laws.

Additionally, we urge city leaders to improve the application process and reduce unnecessary delays for families seeking CityFHEPS assistance. Below we outline the process of improvements the city should pursue; additional recommendations are included in [FHC's 2025 Policy Agenda here](#).

- **Electronic Paperwork:** Application packet forms should be readable/fillable PDF forms that can be signed electronically and emailed back, while still allowing for a paper process.
- **Outreach:** If a client's application is missing documents, DSS should not wait to contact that client via mail or phone call. DSS should also reach out to clients via text or email to have the best chance of successfully connecting with clients. DSS often calls to detail this type of information from an unknown number, so clients may not pick up, and then they miss the opportunity to talk about their application. Then, DSS's next step is to send a letter to the client in the mail. The letter should be clear about what information is needed via the AccessHRA portal.

Additionally, if a DSS staff person does call a client for this purpose; they should leave a call back number, along with hours of availability.

- **Family Moves Within Shelter:** When families are transferred into new shelter locations, the application process should not begin again. When this occurred, it added significant time delays. Applications should be maintained even when families move locations.
- **Single Issue Active PA Case Time Frame:** The current time frame is 30 days but often the process for applying and getting the voucher is longer and requires the single issuance to be resubmitted. We recommend a 90-day time frame.
- **Add Option for Access HRA:** There is currently no process on Access HRA to signify that an application is for single issuance public assistance. This results in many applications being treated as ongoing public assistance. This should be a distinct option on Access HRA to avoid confusion.

Improve Education Continuity

- **Eliminate the 60-day rule for migrant families with children.** 60 days is not sufficient time for shelter staff to work with families to secure public benefits assistance and find permanent housing, and migrant students often miss weeks of school due to mid-year transfers. In the face of a frightening federal landscape facing immigrant families in New York City, we oppose the threat of eviction and re-placements for families with children in shelter. The City should eliminate the requirement that families with children in grades K-6 be forced to move shelters after their initial 60-day placement and should eliminate any shelter moves for families with children in school, no matter the grade level.
- **Increase the Percent of Families DHS Places or Re-Places in Shelter in the Same Borough as Where their Children Attend School.** In the most recent Mayor's Management Report (MMR), there was small progress made in increasing the number of families DHS placed in shelter in the same borough as the family's youngest school-age child. But almost 40% of families in shelter continue to be placed in a different borough from where their youngest child goes to school. Further progress should be made in this area through more deliberate policy, such as integrating conversations into the intake and Independent Living Plan processes about the possible availability of a shelter transfer closer to children's schools and helping parents pursue education-related shelter transfers when desired by parents.
- **Implement the Recommendations of the Students in Temporary Housing Transportation Taskforce.** This task force created through Local Law 158 developed a set of [recommendations](#) that the city should promptly implement to ensure school stability and regular attendance for students in temporary housing.
- **Increase Access to Early Childhood Education for Children in Shelter.** The percentage of age-eligible children in shelter who participated in Pre-K was around 50% in the most recent publicly stated numbers, a 10-percentage point decrease from pre-Covid numbers. The City should make greater efforts to connect age-eligible children in shelter to Pre-K and 3-K by continuing to make automatic offers for 3-K and Pre-K to families in shelter who did not participate in the application process and ensure that 3-K and Pre-K outreach efforts include a targeted approach to increasing access to and participation in early childhood programs for children in shelter (e.g., personalized outreach calls, shelter-based staff talking to all parents of age-eligible children about whether they

want to enroll in 3-K and Pre-K, designating a point person to troubleshoot early childhood enrollment issues).

Combat Poverty and Food Insecurity

Enhance Financial Security for Youth and Families

A recently released Robin Hood and Columbia University report highlighted that in 2023, child poverty in NYC rose to 26%, the highest since 2017 and nearly double the national child poverty level. Although employment numbers have increased citywide, the cost of five necessities that make up the poverty line—food, shelter, utilities, clothing, and telephone/internet—outpaced income growth and the overall rate of inflation.ⁱⁱ The increasing cost of living calls for investments that will provide economic relief to low-income families with children and youth.

CCC urges City leaders make the following investments to lift incomes and make the city more affordable for families:

- **Expand Fair Fares to 200% FPL and baseline \$54.2 million for the program to ensure that more low-income families have access to public transportation.** We were glad to see the Executive Budget include \$20 million in FY26 to maintain Fair Fares funding at 145% FPL. However, far too many struggling families with children are currently ineligible for the fifty percent public transportation reduction, and low-income mothers encounter more barriers than other demographics groups in affording public transportation. As a recent CSS report highlighted, enhancing Fair Fares will ease transit hardship for an additional 400,000 New Yorkers.ⁱⁱⁱ We urge city leaders to fund and baseline \$54.2 million to enable more low-income New Yorkers to afford transportation, and to enhance employment and education opportunities for thousands of youths, low-income mothers, and other New Yorkers.
- **Expand guaranteed income pilot funding.** Guaranteed income programs are a proven vehicle of economic stability and poverty reductions. We therefore commend the City Council's allocation of \$1.5 million in last year's budget to support a guaranteed income pilot for families with children experiencing housing insecurity and recommend expanding this pilot to at least \$5 million in this year's budget. We also urge the City Council and Administration to expand guaranteed income programs for child-welfare and justice-involved youth and families.

Invest in Anti-Hunger Initiative

Last month, the State Comptroller's office released a report stating that while one in nine households in New York State experienced food insecurity between 2020-2022, the majority of those households lived in New York City. The report also noted that the Bronx experienced the highest percentage of food insecurity (20.2%). As a result, more families are looking to food pantries and banks to help alleviate food insecurity. According to City Harvest, approximately 1 million families with children are relying on food pantries every month.

As demand for food pantries and banks continue to increase, funding has not matched this demand. With the prospect of looming federal cuts to hunger programs (especially SNAP), it is imperative that New York City continue to invest and fund resources that are vital to the health and well-being of children and families. We must meet current needs and prepare for the increased demand for emergency food that will likely occur due to federal actions that weaken SNAP, freeze funding for pantries and farmers, and potentially raise food prices.

Although the FY26 Executive Budget restored \$36.1 million to Community Food Connection (CFC) for FY26, this funding is for one year only and does not match the growing needs of families who utilize the food pantries and food banks. Food pantries are the last line of defense against hunger for so many, yet these essential services are being asked to do more with less. A substantial investment in CFC is essential to meet the growing demand for food, address increasing food prices, looming cuts to SNAP, and to provide critical support for vulnerable communities facing worsening affordability and food insecurity crises.

As a member of the NYC Food Policy Alliance, a network of 60+ food system stakeholders that advocate for public policies and funding that ensure equitable access to a healthy, sustainable food system, CCC recommends the following be included in the FY26 Adopted Budget:

- **Increase and baseline** funding for the Community Food Connections (CFC) program to \$100 million to meet the growing demand for food assistance across New York City, including enhanced access to fresh food.
- **Increase** funding for free Health Bucks, New York City's longstanding farmers market SNAP incentive program, which has been baselined at \$500,000 for several years but is no longer sufficient to meet growing demand.
- **Create** a \$5 million Food Justice Fund for community-led project designed to grow food justice and build wealth in BIPOC and low-income communities.

We also support the continuation of funding for the following City Council Initiatives:

- \$8.26 million for Food Pantries
- \$1.5 million for Food Access and Benefits Initiatives
- \$2.134 million for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative

Enhance Services for Systems-Involved Youth and Families

Restore Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and Supportive Programming for Youth and Young Adults

Extensive research demonstrates the positive impacts of ATI and reentry programs, including lowering recidivism and crime.¹ Moreover, for every dollar invested in ATI programs, studies estimate between

\$3.46-\$5.54 in returns, in addition to reduced costs for the criminal justice system and better community health outcomes.²

We are glad that the Executive Budget restored and baselined \$7.6 million for Alternatives to Incarceration and \$4.7 million for re-entry services. These restorations will ensure these programs can support New Yorkers through case management, therapy, housing, employment training and more.

However, a number of critical prevention programs failed to receive restorations in the Executive Budget. We therefore urge City leaders to support the following investments in the FY26 budget:

- **Restore and baseline \$3.3 million** to the IMPACT program, an alternative to placement program for young people who would otherwise be sent to Horizons or Crossroads
- **Restore and baseline \$2.6 million** for Next STEPS (cut August 2023), which offered one-on-one and group mentoring within a cognitive behavioral therapy-based curriculum designed to help young adults make the attitudinal and behavioral changes necessary to avoid criminal activity and re-engage with education, work and community

Invest in Child Welfare Primary Prevention and Workforce Stability

Fundamental to preventing child welfare involvement is investing in the primary prevention supports families need to be safe and secure, including housing, child care, healthy food, and economic supports. At the same time, the prevention workforce currently in place to support families is in crisis. To help ensure that prevention services can best serve children and families, we recommend the following:

- Enhance child welfare prevention contract flexibility to allow providers the ability to aptly respond to different family circumstances
- Invest in salary increases, scholarships and tuition assistance to help agencies sustain a highly trained and credentialed child welfare workforce.
- Ensure that child welfare staff are paid complete salaries and agencies are paid the true cost of services on prevention contracts.
- Reform the current NYC procurement system to ensure timely payments to contracted agencies.

Enhance Supports for Immigrant Youth and Families

In New York City, more than half of children have at least one immigrant parent. Particularly in the face of numerous federal threats, we urge the City Council and Administration to take the following actions in the CFY26 Budget to support the needs of New York's immigrant children and families.

- **Invest \$625,000 for Youth-specific Immigration Legal Services** for young people within the Runaway and Homeless Youth system.
- **Invest \$80 million for Legal Services for Migrant Families.** We urge the City Council to advocate for more legal resources to prevent family separation and more suffering for migrant children and families.
- **Baseline \$5 million to maintain the citywide Community Interpreter Bank** (NYC Interpreter Bank)

- **Invest \$3 million in Workforce Development Programming for immigrants.**

Thank you for your time and consideration of these recommendations to support New York’s children and families.

ⁱ Citizens’ Committee for Children of NY. “Keeping Track of New York Children: 2024”. 2024. https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cccnewyork.org/2024%2F10%2F2024_10_10_CCC-2024-Keeping-Track.pdf

ⁱⁱ Poverty Tracker Research Group at Columbia University. “The State of Poverty and Disadvantage in New York City, Volume 7”. Robin Hood.2025. https://robinhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/PT_Annual24_final_digital.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Chaterjee D., Torres E. “When You Can’t Afford the Fare: How Expanding Fair Fares Can Help Working New Yorkers as Transit Hardships Persist”. The Unheard Third 2023. March 2024. https://smhttp-ssl-58547.nexcesscdn.net/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/031324_UHT2023_Transit_Brief_V6.pdf