



**Citizens' Committee
for Children of NEW YORK**

Testimony of Alice Bufkin

**Associate Executive Director of Data and Policy
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York**

Submitted to the New York State FY 2027 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing

Human Services

February 5th, 2026

For 80 years, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) has been an independent voice for children advancing child and family well-being through research, advocacy, and civic engagement. With deep expertise in data, policy and child-serving systems, CCC champions proven solutions and mobilizes allies to secure reforms that improve child outcomes and promote equity. CCC drives systems change to ensure every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

Thank you, 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 and allowing us the opportunity to respond to Governor Hochul's Executive Budget.

Below, we outline the steps our State must take in the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Executive Budget to ensure that every New York child in every family is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

Strengthen Youth, Families, and Communities

Prioritize Child Welfare Prevention

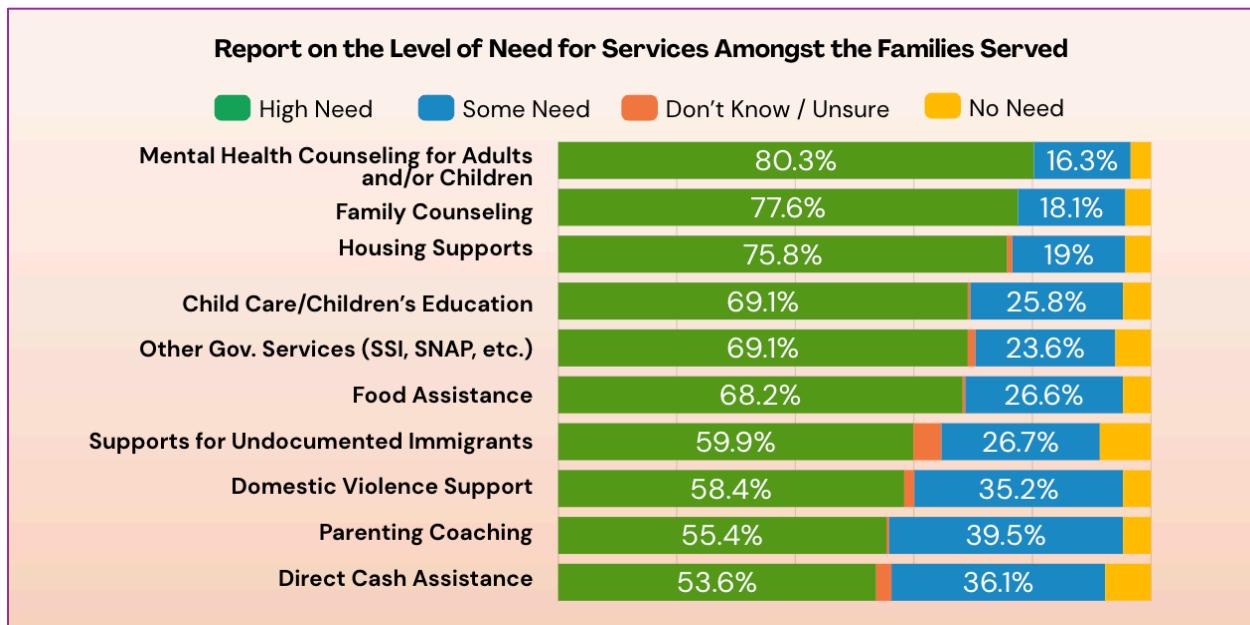
Decades of research have made clear that investments and supports that prevent child welfare involvement are those that promote economic stability. A recent report by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services affirms that investing in services that stabilize families outside of the child welfare system –such as housing, food, education, and child care – is essential for reducing child welfare involvement.ⁱ

In the winter of 2025, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) and the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) surveyed child welfare prevention services providers to better understand the challenges facing families involved in the child welfare system and the nonprofit providers that serve them. [Our findings](#) also underscore the urgent need for primary prevention investments – housing supports, cash assistance, child care, and nutritional services – to meet families' needs and prevent child welfare system involvement.

When families are involved in the child welfare system, they should be met with robust services tailored to meet their specific needs. Unfortunately, providers reported structural challenges often prevent

families' needs from being met. Factors such as contract delays, inadequate salaries, large caseloads, and high turnover have also made it challenging for child welfare prevention staff to fully support the families on their caseload. New requirements that prioritize the use of evidence-based models have also introduced challenges for families and workers, including less flexibility to meet family needs.

The vast majority of providers reported that the volume and complexity of needs exceeded their capacity. Families' most urgent needs are driven by structural issues that significantly limit housing and economic security, and that cannot be resolved within the child welfare prevention system alone. With the persistent housing crisis, worsening affordability, and unemployment rates on the rise, providers increasingly struggle to support families with unmet basic necessities like food, clothing, and cash assistance.



To protect New York's children and strengthen families, the state must prioritize investments in services proven to maintain child safety and keep families economically stable and together:

- **Invest \$30 million in the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund**, allowing families to access resources to support stabilization without having an open child welfare case. This fund would support accessing basic needs such as groceries, diapers, rent, and other resources.
- **Increase the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYSCI) from \$7.9 million to \$10 million**. Ensure this successful and growing program can fully support all young people with foster care experience who are navigating college and currently in the program.
- **Invest in high-quality legal representation for parents with an open child welfare case in family court**. Ensure legal services offer competitive pay and high-quality training to attorneys to support parents protecting their parental rights.

Invest in the Youth Justice Innovation Fund

New York State's youth crime rates have consistently declined since the Raise the Age (RTA) law was first implemented in 2018. Evidence from across the State shows how the law has improved community safety and youth well-being.ⁱⁱ Raise the Age was intended not only to treat justice-involved youth in humane and developmentally appropriate ways, but also to provide counties with the resources needed to prevent involvement and re-involvement of youth in the criminal justice system. These resources were meant to include behavioral health, substance use treatment supports, mentoring, alternatives to detention and incarceration, and other vital support services.

Despite the intentions of RTA, New York State has failed to fully deliver on the promise to fund community-based services and programs. In fact, from 2019-2023, only a third of the money appropriated for youth justice under Raise the Age has been spent. Based on a review of spending in the top 10 counties (outside of NYC) less than 20% of funds approved - sometimes as little as 10% - were for community-based services and programs. New York City, despite representing about half of the youth justice system in the State, has never received these dollars.ⁱⁱⁱ

The State's failure to ensure RTA funds reach the communities it was intended to has deprived communities of the resources they need to enhance services, support youth, and prevent youth involvement in the justice system. **We therefore join partners across the state in urging state leaders to allocate \$50 million for a Youth Justice Innovation Fund to directly fund community-based organizations that provide a continuum of critical youth services, including prevention, early intervention, and alternatives to detention, placement, and incarceration for youth aged 12 through 25.**

The Innovation Fund would take \$50 million of the annual \$250 million appropriation for Raise the Age and dedicate it to directly funding community based organizations providing services ranging from mentoring and school support, to employment and internships, to mental health, counseling and other age-appropriate programs shown to reduce contact with the criminal justice system and future court-involvement. The Innovation Fund builds on successful state-wide efforts like [Project RISE](#), which has brought over \$30 million to communities to combat gun violence through public health strategies, including credible messenger and violence interruption programs. **The fund would help to build up these critical community resources that bolster neighborhood safety and support positive youth development.**

CCC also recommends the following steps to ensure RTA funds are being sent where they are most needed:

- **Expedite** counties' access to the already appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars for the Raise the Age law's implementation.
- **Ensure** New York City can access RTA funding. NYC represents about half of the youth in the state, but statutory language excludes the city from receiving state support. Every county and all New York youth should benefit from state funding under RTA, no matter where they live.

Support Immigrant Families

Thousands of New York immigrant households are in increasing danger of detention, permanent family separation, and deportation. Last year, between January and mid-October, ICE arrested at least 140 children in New York City and has detained and separated thousands of family members throughout the state. These acts cause irreparable harm by tearing families apart, traumatizing children and parents, and forcing children and families into inhumane detention conditions, often leading to deportation away from their homes, communities, and families.^{iv} The federal administration continues to escalate its detention and deportation apparatus, which has resulted in the killing of Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minnesota, the killing of Keith Porter in California, as well as the deaths of six individuals in ICE detention in 2026 alone (Geraldo Lunas Campos, Victor Manuel Diaz, Parady La, Luis Beltran Yanez-Cruz, Heber Sanchez Dominguez, and Luis Gustavo Nunez Caceres).

The scale of federal threats to immigrant New Yorkers demands a strong and proactive response from State leaders to protect and support immigrant families.

We join immigrant advocacy groups throughout the state in urging State leaders to take the following actions:

- **Invest \$175 million in the New York State budget for immigration legal services and infrastructure**, including funding to strengthen and sustain current legal services, develop new emergency deportation defense resources, and build capacity.
- **Pass the Access to Representation Act (ARA), which would establish a right to counsel for immigrants facing deportation (S.141/A.270).**
- **Pass the Bolstering Unrepresented Immigrant Legal Defense Act (BUILD)**, which would lay groundwork for the ARA by funding the infrastructure necessary for legal services providers to create, maintain, and expand robust programs to protect immigrants under attack.
- **Pass the New York for All Act (A3506/S2235)**, which would prohibit and regulate the discovery and disclosure of immigration status by New York state and local government entities.

Fully Invest in Runaway and Homeless Youth Services

Although the FY26 Executive Budget included a welcome increase of \$3.5 million for the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Program, it still does not come close to meeting the true cost for providers to deliver services.

The most recent system-wide data published by OCFS (2020) shows that over the course of that year:

- 5,478 youth stayed in an RHY crisis or transitional living program
- Nearly 2,000 youth were turned away from a bed due to lack of capacity
- 12,400 youth received non-shelter services such as drop-in centers, outreach, and hotlines

These needs have only increased. The 2024 HUD Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) found that New York now has the second-highest number of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in the nation, and unaccompanied youth homelessness rose by over 70% from 2023–2024.² Without access to youth-appropriate shelter, thousands of young people are diverted into the adult shelter system—settings that are often unsafe and developmentally inappropriate, especially for LGBTQIA+ youth.

We urge the Legislature to take action by increasing the RHY budget to begin closing the per-bed funding gap and ensuring that programs can continue to provide:

- **Mental health support for runaway and homeless youth:** Nearly half of young people in RHY programs report needing mental health services, and youth consistently report that lack of safe, youth-specific shelter directly worsens their mental health and prevents them from accessing care.
- **Safe youth-specific shelter for LGBTQIA+ young people:** LGBTQIA+ young people are disproportionately represented in the youth homelessness population. Across the state a third of runaway and homeless youth identify as LGBTQIA+.

Invest in Early Care and Education

Strengthen Access and Address the Workforce Crisis

In recent years, New York State has made historic investments and expanded income eligibility to increase access to child care, making child care affordable for tens of thousands of New York families. Under Governor Hochul, the state has capped co-pays at 1% of a family's income and increased Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) eligibility to 85% of the State Median Income.

We applaud the investments in early care and education Governor Hochul continues to make in expanding access to families in New York State. We appreciate that the FY27 Executive Budget includes an additional \$1.2 billion dollars to maintain CCAP (increasing CCAP funding to over \$3 billion), the creation of the Office for Child Care and Early Education, \$60 million to create universal child care pilot programs in three NYS counties, investing in statewide expansion of universal Pre-K, and partnering with New York City on the creation of the city's 2-Care program, as well as ensuring a sustainable 3-K program. These investments are a critical and positive step in expanding access to child care, but we also know that having a sustainable workforce is necessary to ensure the viability of our child care system.

CCC, in partnership with the Empire State Campaign for Child Care (ESCCC), is calling on the State to build on the Governor's strong child care proposals aimed at expanding access and sustaining the child care system:

- **Provide sustained and reliable compensation and benefits to all members of the child care workforce. (\$1.2 billion)**
 - Create a permanent state fund to increase child care worker compensation. This fund should be robustly resourced and sufficient to offer all members of the child care workforce a significant boost in income; and

- Develop a plan for subsequent years to establish a minimum pay scale and career ladder based upon agreed upon criteria.
- **Adopt** the Governor's proposed \$1.2 billion recurring investment in CCAP, and add additional funding as needed to ensure no eligible families are turned away or placed on waitlists.
- **Adopt** the Governor's proposal to invest \$60 million to support Community Care models in three communities, and add more funds if necessary to ensure they are truly universal and are not treated as one-time pilots, but as a bridge to statewide universal child care
- **Adopt** the Governor's proposal to increase UPK funding to approximately \$500 million to achieve truly universal Pre-K statewide for four-year olds by the 2028-29 school year, which includes providing districts with a per pupil minimum of \$10,000 or the district's current selected Foundation Aid per pupil (whichever is greater) and supporting New York City in achieving truly universal 3-K

As New York State continues towards the path of universal child care, state leaders must prioritize children with disabilities. Throughout New York, too many families of children with disabilities either cannot find child care programs for their child or are turned away because programs are unable to adequately serve their children.^v Proposals like 2-Care in New York City and the model programs in Broome, Monroe and Dutchess counties cannot be successful unless there are resources in place for children with disabilities. Universal child care cannot truly be universal if this population is excluded.

Lift Incomes and Combat Child Poverty

CCC is grateful for the work of the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC), which has developed a comprehensive roadmap for reducing child poverty by 50% over the next ten years. Since CPRAC's inception, New York State has made significant strides in reducing child poverty, including by expanding New York's child tax credit. However, in the face of an affordability crisis and ongoing cuts to SNAP and Medicaid, more must be done to ensure that New York State families have the support they need to be economically secure.

We join the NYS Can End Child Poverty Coalition in urging state leaders to uplift and fund CPRAC's full package of proposals in this year's budget. These proposals include guaranteeing access to food supports for New York families, continuing to build a strong, refundable child tax credit, doubling the maximum cash assistance allowance, and stabilizing and reducing housing costs. As families face rising costs, unaffordable housing and child care, and numerous financial burdens, it is urgent that our state step forward and make long-term and sustainable investments in the future of New York's children and families.

Leverage Tax Policy to Lift Incomes

Tax credits have been shown to be extremely effective tools for reducing child poverty. For instance, the enhancement of the Federal Child Tax Credit (CTC) in 2021 resulted in a nearly 50% reduction in child poverty nationwide and in New York State.^{vi} In turn, the reversal of the Federal CTC in 2022 brought

child poverty back to pre-Covid levels.^{vii} In recent years, states have also enhanced their local child tax credits with favorable poverty reduction outcomes. Studies have illustrated that families used the extra income to address costs like food, clothing, utilities, and credit card debt.^{viii}

We commend Governor Hochul for expanding the Empire State Child Tax Credit to \$1,000 for children under 4 years old and to \$500 for children under 17 years old in the FY26 Budget, as well as removing the phase-in process, which unfairly prevented very low-income households to access the full credit. However, we urge the State to build on last year's achievement towards a strong, refundable child tax credit by:

- **Ensuring** all eligible New York families can easily file their taxes and access the new expanded Empire State Child Credit.
- **Increasing** the credit amount of the Empire State Child Credit to \$1,500 per child per year for children 0-18, as recommended by CPRAC
- **Indexing** benefits to inflation so families can receive the full value of the credit over time
- **Making changes permanent** so families can rely on the credit every year
- **Strengthening** the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) so all working New Yorkers who are eligible may file, including those with Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN), as is permitted with the ESCCC, and increasing the value of the credit

Support Housing Stability and Combat Family Homelessness

New York took an important step towards addressing family homelessness in the FY2026 Budget by investing \$50 million per year for a four year housing voucher program pilot. Despite this progress, a \$50 million investment falls far short of the statewide need. Homelessness continues to rise across New York. In New York, 2 out of 5 households pay more than 30% of their income towards rent, and 1 in 5 pay over 50% of their income towards rent. A report from the New York State Comptroller's Office highlights that the number of homeless children has more than doubled between 2022 (20,299 children) and 2024 (50,773 children). The same report revealed that 32% of New York's homeless are under the age of 18, one of the highest shares in the nation.^{ix}

A statewide HAVP program would operate much like the federal Section 8 program and would assist populations on the brink of homelessness or in shelter, regardless of their immigration status. A commitment of \$250 million for an inclusive statewide housing voucher would have a transformative impact, helping nearly 13,000 families households statewide. According to the NYS Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC), a statewide rental assistance program available to all unsubsidized renting households below 50% AMI would reduce child poverty by 15.7% over the next decade.^x

Families in shelter or at risk of eviction deserve a fully funded rental subsidy program that can meet the full scale of the need. **State leaders must include \$250 million in this year's budget for a statewide Housing Access Voucher Program**

Combat Hunger and Promote Food Security

Families across New York State continue to experience food insecurity at staggering rates. According to the New York State Comptroller's May 2024 report on Food Insecurity in NYS, households with children experienced food insecurity rates of 15% in 2023, much higher than households without children^{xii}. Programs like SNAP and WIC remain a lifeline for low income families, especially in the face of rising costs. In a July 2025, the NYS Comptroller's office reported that 1.75 million New York households received SNAP benefits as of March 2025.^{xii} However, changes to SNAP due to H.R.1 will exacerbate food insecurity for New Yorkers, with about 300,000 losing either part or all of their SNAP benefits.

We applaud anti-hunger investments included in Governor Hochul's Executive Budget, including increased funding for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and investments in chip technology to prevent SNAP theft. However, we were disappointed that Governor Hochul did not include additional investments in SNAP and other food programs to compensate for upcoming benefit losses due to H.R.1.

CCC, in partnership with the New York Food Policy Alliance and the SNAP4ALL coalition, urges Governor Hochul and the State Legislature to make the following investments in the budget:

- **Invest \$244 million for a state-funded nutrition program for those ineligible for the federal SNAP program, including:**
 - 41,000 lawfully present immigrants no longer eligible for SNAP due to immigration status exclusions under H.R.1
 - 65,000 households with children who are currently ineligible for SNAP due to their immigration status
- **Fully fund statewide hunger relief programs, Nourish NY and Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) at \$75 million each.** The Executive Budget currently funds HPNAP and Nourish NY at \$72.8 million and \$55 million, respectively.
- **Fully fund the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program at \$8.5 million** to ensure families continue to get benefits assistance and education.
- **Increase the SNAP minimum benefit to \$100 per month.** When the emergency SNAP Allotment ended in 2023, many New Yorkers saw their SNAP benefits drop to \$23 per month, forcing low-income households to choose between paying for food or for other essential benefits. This amount is insufficient to support low-income families.
- **Invest \$30 million in WIC** to support anticipated program participation increases

Support the Human Services Workforce

Nonprofit human services providers across the state deliver essential services to support the well-being of children and families. Investments in the human services workforce are critical to retain talent and to promote quality services for New Yorkers that rely on their support.

- **Support the Bring Up Minimum Pay (BUMP) anti-poverty campaign seeking to pass legislation that will permanently achieve economic justice for human service workers by increasing base wages to reflect the cost of living.** A true cost of living wage floor, paired with annual cost of living adjustments that reflect real rates of rising costs, is necessary to permanently change the economic trajectory for this vital work force.
- **Provide 2.7% targeted inflationary increase for the Human Services sector.** We greatly appreciate Governor Hochul continuing to commit to a cost-of-living increase for this vital workforce. However, the depth of the need is enormous and requires sustained and increased investments.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your consideration of these recommendations.

ⁱ NYS Office of Children and Family Services. New York State Family First Prevention Services Act Prevention Plan. <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/sppd/docs/FFPSA-Prevention-Plan-2022-07-29.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Division of Criminal Justice Services. “UCR Juvenile Arrest/Criminal Activity Data - Under 18.” <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/juvenilearrests/index.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ DCJS Arrest Data analysis, accessed here: <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/juvenilearrests/index.htm>

^{iv} Ana Ley and Hamed Aleaziz. New York Times. *Immigration Officials Deport Queens 6-Year-Old and Father Who Fled China*. 2025. Accessed here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/19/nyregion/child-father-deported-china-nyc.html>

^v The Hechinger Report. For kids with disabilities, child care options are worse than ever. <https://hechingerreport.org/for-kids-with-disabilities-child-care-options-are-worse-than-ever/>. May 2023.

^{vi} Dana Korsen. “Federal Tax Credits in 2021 Lifted More than 2 Million Children Out of Poverty.” 2025. <https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/federal-tax-credits-in-2021-lifted-more-than-2-million-children-out-of-poverty-says-new-report>

^{vii} Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Record Rise in Poverty Highlights Importance of Child Tax Credit; Health Coverage Marks a High Point Before Pandemic Safeguards Ended . September 2023. <https://www.cbpp.org/press/statements/record-rise-in-poverty-highlights-importance-of-child-tax-credit-health-coverage>

^{viii} Educational Alliance. Settlement House American Rescue Plan Impact Study: Wave 1 Report. 2022. <https://edalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/SHARPImpact-Study-Wave-1-Sep-2022.pdf>

^{ix} DiNapoli, T. P. New Yorkers in Need, Homelessness in NY State. NY State Comptroller Office. January 2025

^x Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council. *Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council: 2024 Recommendations and Progress Report*. 2024. Accessed Here: <https://otda.ny.gov/news/meetings/CPRAC/2024-12-18/attachments/2024-12-18-CPRAC-2024-Recommendations-and-Progress-Report.pdf>

^{xi} New York State Comptroller. Food Insecurity Persists Post Pandemic. May 2024. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/reports/food-insecurity-persists-post-pandemic>