

## Putting Children and Families First

New York ranks 28<sup>th</sup> in the nation on measures of child well-being.<sup>i</sup> Poverty and inequality threaten our communities and the State's economic vitality and strain public systems including health, education and public safety. The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy's priorities focus on putting children and families first to strengthen the health and well-being of our state.

### **Enact policies that strengthen families and promote family economic security.**

**Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit.** Raise the State EITC to 40% of the federal benefit. The EITC is one of the best ways to "make work pay" for low-income families. Research shows that children of EITC recipients do better in school and are healthier.<sup>ii</sup>

**Increase the minimum wage, including the minimum for tipped workers.** Increase the minimum wage to \$15.00 and index it to inflation so full-time workers do not live in poverty.

**Enact paid family leave.** There is a cost-effective and budget neutral legislative proposal to secure paid family leave so working families do not have to choose between caring for a child or other family member and keeping their job.

**Expand access to high-quality early learning, including child care.** NY has made strides toward universal high-quality full-day prekindergarten, but more is needed to ensure quality and capacity. Add funding to the Universal Pre-Kindergarten program for districts outside New York City, support efforts in New York City to fully implement Pre-K and fix the allocation methodology.

**Strengthen maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting.** Home visiting is a cost-effective two-generation intervention with proven benefits for young children and families.

The State must expand access and increase funding for home visiting including:

- \$4 million for Nurse-Family Partnership
- \$3.5 million to Healthy Families NY
- \$2 million in promising home visiting programs such as Parent-Child Home and Parents as Teachers
- Improve coordination and measurement across programs

### **Strengthen public health, health coverage, access and care and improve transparency and accountability.**

**Invest in policies that prevent and treat dental disease, including community water fluoridation.** Oral health disease is the most common chronic disease in children and its effects can last a lifetime. Community water fluoridation is the single most cost-effective way to prevent it. Communities need resources to preserve community water fluoridation.

**Strengthen Children's Behavioral Health.** State funds should support a Medicaid benefit package that assures all children receive developmentally appropriate care and services. This includes developmental screening with appropriate referrals as needed and timely access to acute and stabilization services including settings that support children and families such as school-based health centers. In addition, 25% of start-up funds for health and mental health transformation initiatives should

be dedicated to children's behavioral health infrastructure development to lay the groundwork for a smooth transition to managed care. This includes funds designated for health care information technology, workforce development and technical assistance, service capacity expansion, and development of Health Home infrastructure.

**Develop a system that effectively serves at-risk families, prevents entry into the child welfare system, and produces positive results for children and families.**

**Fund preventive, protective, independent living, adoption, and aftercare services at 65% State share, per NYS Statute.** Restore the State's reimbursement for preventive and protective services back to the statutory level of 65% (up from the current reduced level of 62%). Require counties use the increased funding to supplement rather than supplant current investments.

**Fund the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP).** New York should support families and promote permanent placement for children in child welfare with family members through KinGAP, subsidized guardianship. For families to take more advantage of KinGAP the State should:

- Remove KinGAP from the Foster Care Block Grant and fund it similarly to the adoption subsidy
- Allow subsidy payments to continue until age 21 regardless of age of finalization

- Enable payments for the child if the relative dies
- Use the same definition of kin as is used for kinship foster care

**Fund Kinship Navigator and Services.** Renew New York's commitment to reduce foster care placements and add \$1 million to increase kinship care services which is now only in 9 counties; down from 33 counties just four years ago. Increase funds for the kinship navigator program to \$300,000 to assure families understand and access important supports.

**Foster College Success.** Support a comprehensive college success program to support youth pursuing higher-education who either are or had been in foster care after age 12. Only 18-24% of college age foster youth enroll in college after high school as compared to 60% of students overall and only 2-7% of foster youth complete a two or four year degree. Part of the State's responsibility to its foster youth is assuring that they have the resources to attend and succeed in college. Youth who graduate from college have a higher chance of securing and retaining employment in adulthood.

**Raise the Age.** It is time for New York to raise the age of criminal responsibility. Support recommendations from the Governor's Commission on Public Safety and Juvenile Justice to raise the age and better support the juvenile justice system to assure children are treated as children.

<sup>i</sup> 2014 Kids Count Profile for New York

<sup>ii</sup> "Improving Tax Fairness with a State Earned Income Tax Credit" Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy May 2014