SCAA Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

Social Services Policy Priorities 2018-19

Strengthen New York's Children, Families, and Communities

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy's 2018-2019 social services policy priorities aim to support and strengthen the health, well-being and economic security of New York families, children and communities, particularly those who are disenfranchised. With the federal government poised to divest from social services, now, more than ever, New York must lead by putting children, families and communities at the center of our State policy.

This year, we urge the state to build upon and complement the innovative work of the State's First 1,000 Days on Medicaid initiative by paying particular attention to the youngest New Yorkers in its budget. Robust investment in services that improve the economic security, welfare and care of our youngest New Yorkers is essential because infants and toddlers are the most likely to experience severe and lifelong deficits when exposed to poverty, hunger and stress in the early years.[1] And, early investments reap cost-saving outcomes for both children and communities down the road in numerous realms, including health, social support programs, housing, and workforce participation.

Expand Access to Affordable, Quality Child Care to Enable Parents to Work and Children to Thrive.

More than 80% of New York families with young children and income below 200% of the poverty level cannot access child care subsidies. This makes it difficult or impossible for parents to secure full-time, stable employment and attain economic security. High-quality child care has been shown to substantially improve children's educational outcomes and future success. **New York State children and families need a clear plan to provide equitable access to quality child care for all New York children and working families, and a family sustaining income for child care providers**. While we work on a long-term plan, **we call on the New York Legislature and Governor Cuomo** to increase our State investment in child care by at least $100 million in 2018. This investment can be drawn from several different areas of the budget and should be directed specifically to:

1. **Increase State funding to counties for child care subsidies by $31 million* in order to:**
   a. restore the child care subsidy program to the funding level established in 2016, adjusting for both the 2017 cut of $7 million and two years of inflation; and
   b. assist counties that regularly exhaust their child care funding allocations before meeting the needs of all eligible families, to expand the number of qualified families served.

2. **Increase State funding further to stabilize the child care workforce and infrastructure, and to ensure equitable access to quality care. Specifically, the state should:**
   a. reinstate the 75th percentile formula to establish reimbursement rates expected to change in October, 2018 to ensure that all children have equal access to high-quality care; and
   b. allocate funds to assist child care centers and group family day care providers that receive child care subsidies to cover increased wage costs as the new minimum wage standard is implemented across the state.

3. **Direct a portion of Economic Development funding dollars to further reduce the number of qualified families who are currently denied subsidy assistance, and to stabilize the child care workforce.**

   If directed toward expanding access to quality child care, such investment can remove barriers to broad workforce participation, support worker productivity, and bolster the local child care industry.

4. **Increase State funding for the Child Care Facilitated Enrollment Projects** in order to expand access to subsidies available to working families at higher income eligibility levels.

5. **Expand and adjust the child and dependent care tax credit for maximum benefit.** Adjusting the CDCTC to be allocated on a monthly or quarterly basis will help low-income families who live paycheck to paycheck to cover the costs of child care.

Expand Access to Home Visiting to Strengthen Families.

Maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting programs are voluntary programs through which trained professionals engage at-risk mothers before and after birth. Programs have shown impressive results in increasing the stability, safety, health and learning for both children and parents – while reducing short- and long-term use of costly services.

The New York State Home Visiting Workgroup makes the following **recommendations** to better support children and families across New York State in the 2018-19 SFY Budget.

- Increase the State investment in Nurse-Family Partnership to $5 million.
- Increase the State investment in the Parent-Child Home Program by $2 million.
- Add $2 million for Parents as Teachers to serve families on waiting lists at all current sites.
- Maintain $23.3 million for Healthy Families New York.
- Additionally, the state should provide funding for other evidence-based and promising practice programs in order to meet the diverse needs of communities.

To better support home visiting programs and home visitors around the state, the workgroup **requests funding to create the position of a statewide orientation/training coordinator** to improve collective support of families and improve staff retention/program capacity.

Strengthen the State's Child Tax Credit to Make Work Pay for Low- and Moderate-Income Families.

Modest income transfers to low-income families – particularly families with young children – can yield tremendous benefits for children and their families, including improved physical, emotional and behavioral health, higher educational attainment and increased future earnings.[2, 3] The benefits are particularly great – and most acutely needed – in families with very young children. This is the case because families with young children face poverty at greater rates than other families. In fact, the birth of a child is the leading trigger of "poverty spells" experienced by families.[4]

While New York is a leader in the nation in offering a refundable child tax credit (the Empire State Child Credit), the State credit contains a significant flaw: it excludes children under age four from eligibility – the very group that is most severely impacted by poverty, and would most benefit

from receiving a credit. The state should strengthen the Empire State Child Credit by:

- Expanding it to provide credits for children under age four.
- Doubling the credit for very young children to reflect that families with young children are more likely to be poor, and that young children are more adversely impacted by poverty.

Expand Community-Based Family Strengthening Services to Prevent Toxic Stress and Maltreatment.

Currently, New York State's child welfare system only provides preventive services to families AFTER there is a report of maltreatment. These services are essential to strengthening families and enabling children to remain safely in their homes. **The State should ensure that this critical funding stream remains open-ended and uncapped.** In addition, in order to build strong community environments for children and help to avoid toxic stress to the child, **the state should invest in and encourage targeted, community-based family strengthening services** – before there is any risk to the child – that have been proven to keep children safely with their families.

New York City is piloting Family Enrichment Centers in three high-need communities. These community-based centers – welcoming families regardless of child welfare involvement – will focus on building family resilience and stability by providing an array of supports that reinforce economic mobility, parenting skills, positive relationships, housing, child development and education, community engagement and supportive advocacy. This demonstration project is a small-scale example of what the state could implement to strengthen families and communities, and prevent child abuse and neglect.

Ensure Access to Housing for Families & Youth Leaving Foster Care.

Since 1988, the Social Services Law has provided for a child welfare housing subsidy to help stabilize housing for families and youth and prevent children from entering foster care, help families when children reunify from foster care, and help youth who age out of foster care. Due to the low subsidy amount, the child welfare housing subsidy is no longer able to effectively prevent homelessness for families and youth involved with the child welfare system.

To ensure the housing subsidy is better able to stabilize housing for families and youth, the state should:

- Increase the monthly housing subsidy allowance to $600 (from $300).
- Increase the upper age limit eligibility from 21 to 24 so that youth who age out of foster care at 21 can avail themselves of the subsidy for up to 3 years.
- Ensure those receiving the housing subsidy can live with unrelated roommates.

Invest in Kin Care Services and Enhance the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP).

Placing children with relatives when their parents are unable to care for them helps to maintain connections to family and culture. New York should better support kinship families and cultivate permanent placements for children with family members by:

- Increasing investment in the Kinship Navigator and kinship care programs to ensure that non-foster care kinship families have access to benefits and services.

- Improve services and outcomes for children who are being cared for by kin when their parents cannot care for them due to immigration detention or deportation. This issue will require significant attention, given the current federal administration's focus on immigration issues.
- So that more families can take advantage of KinGAP, the state should remove it from the Foster Care Block Grant and fund it like the adoption subsidy.

Support College Success for Youth in Foster Care.

Only 2 to 7% of foster youth complete a two- or four-year degree leaving them less likely to secure and retain employment in adulthood. The Foster Youth College Success Initiative helps to address this issue by providing comprehensive support for young people in foster care attending college, thereby increasing the number of New York foster youth who attend and successfully graduate from college.

The program – established in the 2015 Budget – is currently funded at $4.5 million. The cost for each cohort (class of students) is approximately $1.5 million. To reach capacity, the program will need funding for four cohorts (total of $6.0 million).

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[1] Starting Smart: How Early Experiences Affect Brain Development. (2d. Ed. 2000). *Zero to Three* and *The Ounce of Prevention Fund.* www.education.com/reference/article/smart-early-experiences-brain-iq/

[2] Garfinkel, I., Harris, D., Waldfogel, J., & Wimer, C. (2016). Doing More for Our Children: Modeling a Universal Child Allowance or More Generous Child Tax Credit. *The Century Foundation.* https://tcf.org/content/report/doing-more-for-our-children/

[3] White, G.B. (2015). Income Makes a Big Difference for Kids. *The Atlantic*. http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/09/income-inequality-poverty-children/407512/

[4] West, Rachel, Boteach, Melissa, & Vallas, Rebecca (Aug. 12, 2015). Harnessing the Child Tax Credit as a Tool to Invest in the Next Generation. *Center for American Progress*. https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2015/08/12/118731/harnessing-the-child-tax-credit-as-a-tool-to-invest-in-the-next-generation/