



SCHUYLER CENTER FOR ANALYSIS AND ADVOCACY 2020-2021 Policy Priorities

Schuyler Center prioritizes policies that improve child health and well-being, enable families to achieve economic security, and augment quality early childhood opportunities, so that all New York children have a fair opportunity to thrive. Our priorities focus on strengthening families before they experience crises or trauma and preventing families from enduring hardships like ill-health, economic insecurity, child welfare involvement, or encounters with juvenile justice. Another overarching priority: ensuring comprehensive supports for our youngest New Yorkers, ages 0 to 3, at this critical time when their brains and bodies are most rapidly developing, with impacts that can last a lifetime.

With the mid-year budget report showing New York State facing a substantial budget shortfall, the headwinds to securing critical investments for strategies proven to improve child and family well-being will be strong. Among the programs most critical for ensuring the health, economic security, and overall well-being of New York families and children is our comprehensive and inclusive Medicaid program. Few states cover more people or provide as wide an array of community- and home-based services as New York.

This deficit should not – and cannot – be resolved by diverting funds from already underfunded supports for our children and families, nor by walking back New York’s strong commitment to providing comprehensive health coverage and access through Medicaid to low-income people and people with disabilities. With the 11th biggest economy in the world (just after Canada), and a \$175 billion annual budget, New York has the means to invest in strategies that strengthen families and prevent child and family hardship, and address the budget shortfall.

We urge New York leaders to stand firmly with our children and families, and take the following bold steps in the 2020-2021 Legislative Session:

New York State provides targeted, comprehensive support for New Yorkers in the first 1,000 days.

- ▶ New York State comprehensively invests in and integrates policies to improve the health and well-being of all New Yorkers in their first three years of life.
- ▶ New York State improves access to services and supports that help babies and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities by increasing payment rates for Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education professionals in the 2020-21 New York State Budget and aligning and better coordinating Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education programs.

- ▶ New York State expands maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting to all eligible and interested families by:
 - Increasing state investment in evidence-based programs; and
 - Launching the pilot projects created by the First 1,000 Days on Medicaid, laying the ground work for leveraging Medicaid to help achieve statewide expansion.

New York State prioritizes policies to dramatically reduce child poverty and to strengthen family economic security.

- ▶ New York State publicly commits to cutting child poverty in half by 2030, and begins – this year – to implement strategies proven to reduce child poverty and move families into economic security, including by creating a robust, fully refundable young child tax credit that is widely available including to very low-income and immigrant families; and expanding access to high-quality, affordable child care.
- ▶ New York State orients the state’s tax code to benefit low-income families, children, and young adults by:
 - Expanding and strengthening the Empire State Child Credit
 - » Establish a new early childhood tax credit of up to \$1,000 per child
 - » Fully phase-in credit at \$1
 - » Expand the existing credit to up to \$500 for children 4-17
 - Increasing and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit
 - » Restructure the state’s EITC to align with the state’s increasing minimum wage such that it continues to encourage, rather than discourage, low-wage workers to work
 - » Extend the EITC to childless workers under age 25
 - Improving the structure of working family tax credits
 - » Allow quarterly payments option
 - » Make the EITC available to more immigrant New Yorkers by adjusting filing requirements to mimic those of the Empire State Child Credit

New York State expands and improves health and public health supports, particularly for families and children.

- ▶ New York State improves and expands screening and treatment for maternal depression.
- ▶ New York State promotes and expands community water fluoridation.
- ▶ New York State rationalizes and increases investment in public health programs that protect and promote population health.

New York State expands and improves early childhood development and education opportunities.

- ▶ New York State commits to achieving universal access to quality, affordable child care by 2025.

To set New York on a path to meeting the goal of universal access, and to curb the loss of providers and the exodus of educators from the field while working toward this goal, New York makes significant building block investments in child care this year, including by:

- Investing at least \$40M to create a fund to increase workforce compensation and improve child care quality. Priority should be given to programs that serve low-income families and care for infants and toddlers; and
- Investing at least \$60 million to take meaningful steps toward achieving universal access to quality, affordable child care by 2025 by incrementally increasing the guaranteed eligibility levels and decreasing the co-payment multiplier.

New York State improves child welfare by strengthening families.

- ▶ New York State expands and improves family-based foster care; reduces use of congregate care; expands and strengthens supports for kin caregivers by:
 - Renewing and expanding the Family First Transition Fund by allocating \$4.5 million in public funding each year for the next two years (up from \$3 million) to support the continued implementation of Family First, and to ensure counties meet their targets for reducing placements in congregate care, and increasing their use of kin foster placements in those instances where a child cannot remain safely with their birth parents;
 - Ensuring counties have dedicated resources to place foster youth with relatives or family friends whenever possible by creating a funding stream for the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) separate from the Foster Care Block Grant (FCBG);
 - Establishing a “firewall” in the foster care placement process to exhaust all possibilities of kin-based care before placing a child elsewhere by creating systems to ensure that the search for kin is exhaustive, thorough plans and navigation for supports and services for families are in place, and that any non-kin placement is approved by a senior director; and
 - Improving accountability within the foster care system by establishing an office of the Foster Care Ombudsman, tasked with receiving questions and complaints and foster care policies and practice, and providing real-time resolution. The Ombudsman would also regularly issue reports that could help identify trends and lead to system improvement.

- ▶ New York State expands and improves preventive services to strengthen families by increasing from 62% to 65% the State share of costs for these services, as provided in statute, and to reserve that increased funding for community-based primary prevention services that reach families before there is a risk of removal to foster care.
- ▶ New York State strengthens its child welfare housing subsidy to adjust for rising housing costs and better meet the needs of youth and families involved in the child welfare system. The amount of the subsidy has remained the same since it was created over three decades ago and places certain restrictions that limit utilization. If increased and strengthened, this subsidy could emerge as an important strategy for keeping families together, and preventing homelessness among youth aging out of foster care.
- ▶ New York State increases access to data on preventive services by amending Social Services Law Section 409a on Collection and Reporting of Data on Child Welfare Prevention Services to require annual reporting related to NYS Child Welfare Systems including prevention services for increased oversight and accountability.

New York State’s Medicaid program effectively and holistically serves all eligible New Yorkers.

- ▶ New York State ensures that people get the coverage, care, and services to which they are entitled and adequately supports the providers that serve them.

Schuyler Center monitors and is prepared to respond appropriately to emergent issues that stand to affect New York children and families.

Among the issues affecting New York families and children we expect will, or should, emerge as priorities among New York lawmakers in 2020 are: ensuring all New Yorkers – including young children – are counted in the 2020 census; addressing proposed or new federal rules and practices that could harm the economic, emotional, and physical well-being of immigrant families and children; and raising children’s health considerations in connection with efforts to legalize adult-use recreational marijuana.

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