

March 19, 2020

Dear Legislator:

We urge policymakers, during this crisis and as the SFY 2020-21 budget is being finalized, to focus on the health and well-being of all New Yorkers, and especially low-income families and children and all who are living on the margins. Those already facing challenges of poverty, disability, ill-health, racial discrimination, and poor mental health stand to suffer disproportionately from school closures, layoffs, supply shortages, social distancing, and other measures being implemented to address the COVID-19 pandemic. We are grateful for the swift and thoughtful steps New York leaders have taken to address the crisis to date.

### **Budget Priorities: Overall**

Do not cut Medicaid.

Reject cost shifts to local government. Local government /county public health departments are on the front lines of this battle against COVID-19. They need all the resources possible to enable them to meet this public health challenge.

Recognize that level/flat funding for human services are really a cut and result in reductions in services/quality/capacity.

### **Emergency Priorities: Immediate needs due to COVID-19 pandemic**

#### **Child Care**

- Classify child care providers as “essential personnel.”
- Provide significant and flexible State emergency funding to enable a critical mass of child care programs to remain safely open during the crisis to ensure that parents providing essential medical, public health, government, social/human, public safety, retail, sanitation, and other services can continue to work.
- Ensure parents who are performing “essential work” have access to affordable high-quality child care, including child care educators, many of whom now have child care needs due to school closures.
- Ensure those providers have the cleaning supplies, masks, and other materials necessary to keep themselves and the children in their care safe.
- Preserve and stabilize the state’s child care centers and home-based providers so they can weather this emergency.

#### **Emergency Paid Family Leave**

The NYS bill passed March 18, 2020, is a tremendous first step. Given the ever-changing landscape, we urge some additions to the emergency rules:

- Parents who must remain home to care for children in schools closed to control the pandemic (but not because of a quarantine order), should be eligible for emergency Paid Family Leave (PFL).
- Allow self-employed, which includes many child care providers, to qualify for emergency PFL without an extended waiting period.

### **Empire State Child Credit**

Enact the Governor's proposal to include children under age four in the Empire State Child Credit, expand the credit to benefit the lowest income families, and make this credit effective for tax year 2020. Low-income New York families will be experiencing significant economic hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic for many months to come; this credit will be of help.

### **Access to Health Care and Medicaid**

- Restructure or eliminate the Medicaid global cap.
- Do not accept the Executive Budget's proposal to shift Medicaid costs back to localities. Now, more than ever, New York needs robust, expansive Medicaid coverage.

### **Public Health**

- Restore funding for the Center for Health Workforce Studies (CHWS) (\$148,000) to support and promote health workforce planning. There is an urgent need for workforce data and analysis to help us better understand the supply and distribution of the state's health professionals as we work to respond to emerging public health threats, such as coronavirus/COVID-19; better understand the geographic distribution of the health workforce; address racial and gender inequities; and improve access to behavioral, primary, and other critical health care.
- Include in the budget the language from A.7213 (Fahy) / S.5093 (Stavisky) to generate health workforce data to inform and improve health planning and access and emergency preparedness.
- Renew investment in local public health agencies. For many years, local health departments have been subject to stagnant State aid and categorical funding reductions, even as their mission has grown substantially with each passing year. Many health departments have come to a point where they are compelled to make difficult decisions about what public health threats they can and cannot adequately combat.

## **2020-2021 Budget Priorities**

### **Early Care and Learning**

To prevent New York's child care system from falling into further decline as the Governor's Child Care Availability Task Force formulates long-term recommendations to transform the child care system into one that provides quality care to all families that need it, include the following building-block investments in child care in the budget:

- At least \$40 million to create a fund to increase workforce compensation, stabilize providers, and improve child care quality; and at least \$60 million for the State's child care subsidy program to expand access to working families by making eligibility levels and co-pays more

fair and uniform across the state. Some or all of these funds could be derived by requiring in budget language that a portion of workforce development/economic development funds are directed to child care - an essential workforce/economic development support. Without a bridge investment in child care this year, the foundations of the system the Governor's Child Care Availability Task Force are currently working to strengthen will crumble further, at great cost to the state's economic health.

- At a minimum, maintain the proposed \$15 million increase for Pre-Kindergarten for 3- and 4-year-olds.

#### **Child Welfare: Family First Act readiness and supporting preventive services and family-based child care**

- Do not accept the Executive Budget's proposal to cut preventive services funding by \$25 million, and restore the state funding ratio to 65% (it has been reduced to 62% for years, which is at odds with the statute).
- Include in the budget language from S.7964 (Persaud/Salazar)/ A.10069 (Wright/Jaffee) and \$1 million to create an office of the Foster Care Ombudsman, which will better support kinship and foster families and the children in their care. As the State moves toward implementation of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), which requires New York to ensure that more children are appropriately placed with families, retaining and recruiting more kin and foster families will become increasingly important.
- Add \$4.5m to the Executive Budget's proposal (of \$560,000) to fund the Kinship Navigator and caregiver services for a total \$5 million in funding.
- Keep the Foster Care Block Grant whole and move KinGAP funding to the adoption subsidy line to incentivize counties to inform families of all their options.

#### **Healthy Child Development**

- Include in the budget an Early Intervention (EI) covered lives assessment, requiring commercial insurers to contribute at least \$40 million to the cost of EI and to use the savings to increase EI reimbursement rates to help address the shortages in services for young children with developmental delays and disabilities.
- Increase rates for Early Intervention providers, evaluators, and service coordinators by 10% and increase Preschool Special Education classroom and evaluation rates by 10% in the budget.
- Restore \$1 million to the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Public-Private Partnership that funds several ParentChild+ and Parents as Teachers maternal, infant, early childhood home visiting programs reaching families in Onondaga County, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Monroe County.

#### **Earned Income Tax Credit**

- Include in the budget the language from A.8066 (Wright) / S.6259 (Benjamin) to allow for periodic payments of the state EITC to boost the incomes of working New Yorkers throughout the year.

- Expand the New York State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to cover two currently excluded groups: young childless adults ages 18-24 and immigrant filers with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs), and begin to bring it more in-line with the rising minimum wage.

### **Adult Homes**

Enact, through the budget, A. 9898 (Hevesi) / S. 8001 (Persaud) to increase the personal needs allowance (PNA) for adult home residents from \$207 per month to \$300 per month over five years. The increase would cost \$3 million per year for the 13,000 SSI recipients living in adult homes.

Sincerely,



Kate Breslin  
President & CEO