Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees
SFY 2021-22 Executive Budget
Human Services Budget Hearing
February 9, 2021

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The Schuyler Center thanks the chairs and members of the respective committees for the opportunity to testify on the 2021-22 New York State Executive Budget. The Schuyler Center is a 149-year-old statewide, nonprofit organization dedicated to policy analysis and advocacy in support of public systems that meet the needs of disenfranchised populations and people living in poverty.

Our priorities this year, as in the past, focus on <u>strengthening</u> families before they experience crises or trauma and <u>preventing</u> families from enduring hardships like ill-health, economic insecurity, child welfare involvement, or encounters with juvenile justice. Another over-arching priority: ensuring comprehensive and strategic investment in our youngest New Yorkers, ages 0 to 3, when their brains and bodies are most rapidly developing, with impacts that can last a lifetime.

Schuyler Center leads and participates in several coalitions focused on children and families, including Raising New York; the Child Welfare Coalition; CHAMPS (Children Need Amazing Parents); the Empire State Campaign for Child Care; Winning Beginning New York; Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College; Fostering Youth Success Alliance; Raise the Age; Medicaid Matters New York; and a statewide workgroup on maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting, which brings together State agencies, providers and advocates to strengthen coordination between and access to important whole-family interventions.

For more about Schuyler Center and our work, please visit our website www.scaany.org.

OVERVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for New York children and families and all low-income and marginalized New Yorkers. As of July, 2020, an estimated 4,200 New York children had experienced a parental death due to COVID-19, and the COVID-19 economic downturn had pushed an additional 325,000 New York children into poverty or near poverty. With the pandemic persisting, we believe the number of New York children newly experiencing poverty and near poverty due to the pandemic is now much higher. Women in great numbers are being disproportionately forced to reduce work hours or drop out of the workforce to care for children unable to attend in-person school or child care, causing ever more pressure on family economic security.[1] Children across communities, but particularly those in communities of color, immigrant and low-income communities, are struggling to keep up with remote school due to faulty internet service, a lack of devices, English Language Learning support, or support for children with disabilities.

What New York children and families need to put them on the path to recovery and success is a budget with a plan to prioritize their needs. What all New Yorkers who are low-income and struggling need is a budget with a plan that prioritizes investments that will reduce inequality and lead to a recovery that leaves no one behind.

This **Executive Budget** does not contain such a plan.

The headline of this **Budget** is that it imposes 5% "across-the-board" cuts in most human services areas – the antithesis of a plan. By definition, across-the-board cuts unduly harm programs with small budgets that in many cases have been underfunded for years and communities with limited capacity to raise local revenue. Such actions also lead to proposals that are deaf to the state's current challenges. In the human services sector, this is the case with the proposed cuts to child welfare, including preventive services, at a time when families are facing unprecedented challenges; flat funding to child care when the sector is at its breaking point; and cuts to after school services when schools are remote, and children are in desperate need of supervision and guidance.

In short, this **Executive Budget** is not a budget that puts children and families and low-income New Yorkers first, but there remains time, and opportunity, to craft a final, enacted budget, that prioritizes investing in children and families, advancing racial justice, and reducing poverty and inequality.

CHILD POVERTY

ESTABLISH TARGETS TO CUT CHILD POVERTY IN HALF BY 2030, AND TAKE BOLD STEPS THIS YEAR TO BEGIN MEETING THAT GOAL

We challenge New York leaders – the Governor and Legislature – to make a public, binding commitment to **cut child poverty in half in ten years,** and dedicate State dollars to set New York on a path to meeting that target. The newly introduced **Child Poverty Reduction Act S.2755 (Ramos)/ A.1160 (Bronson)** sets a path for New York to reach this goal.

New York entered the pandemic with more than 700,000 children living in poverty,[2] representing 18% of all New York children, with that percentage a full ten points higher for Black children, and seven for Latino children.[3] Compared to the rest of the nation, New York children were more likely to live in poverty than children in 32 other states.[4] And these rates do not include the hundreds of thousands of children and families pushed into poverty and near poverty since the pandemic struck.[5] The child poverty rate in New York is undoubtedly much higher now.

We know from experience after the Great Recession, if leaders do not act with urgency and firm resolve, this pandemic surge in child poverty will persist long after the state turns the corner to recovery. In the wake of the Great Recession, child poverty in New York rose to 23% in 2011 and hovered there through 2014, after which it slowly declined to 18% in 2019. For Black and Latino children, the child poverty rates post-Great Recession sky-rocketed. For Hispanic/Latino children, they reached a shocking 36% in 2012; for Black children the rate hit 35% in 2013.[6] For all children, rates reduced steadily after 2013, but racial disparities persisted.

The sobering lesson to draw from the state's experience after the Great Recession: If New York does not take immediate, decisive action, it could take years, if not decades, to reverse the child poverty impacts of the pandemic.

For our children experiencing poverty, every day New York fails to prioritize ending child poverty matters. The experience of poverty and trauma in childhood can have long-lasting impacts on development. The stress of poverty can alter the brain development of young children – causing permanent changes in the structure and functioning of the brain. As a result, many children who experience poverty face significant challenges – in the form of poor health, academic obstacles, lower earnings – for the rest of their lives. With the stakes so high, there should be no delay in tackling child poverty, no matter the fiscal challenges facing the state.

S.2755/A.1160 provides New York the tools needed to reduce child poverty. It requires New York to make a public commitment to cutting child poverty in half by 2030; requires an annual public report of the effects that any adjustment or reduction by the director of the budget will have on child poverty; establishes the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council to develop a plan to achieve this goal; requires regular reporting to hold government to account; and directs the Advisory Council to evaluate policies proven to sharply cut child poverty including:

- Strengthening and expanding New York's Earned Income Tax Credit;
- Expanding and strengthening New York's child tax credit especially to include young children;
- Expanding work training and employment programs;
- Increasing access to subsidized housing vouchers; and
- Expanding access to subsidized child care.

New York should also implement evidence-based strategies each year to set New York on a path to reducing child poverty and moving families into economic stability beginning this year by expanding and strengthening New York's Empire State Child Credit. Specifically, the state should extend the Empire State Child Credit in the manner set forth in A.3146 (Hevesi). This bill would expand the Empire State Child Credit to cover currently excluded young children and those children living in deep poverty, increase the maximum available credit to $500 for all children, and provide an enhanced maximum credit of $1,000 for the youngest New Yorkers (who experience poverty at higher rates than other children, and are more vulnerable to its impacts). Robust child credits or allowances have been shown to be the most effective strategy for reducing child poverty.[7]

We urge passage of the Child Poverty Reduction Act S.2755/A.1160 this session, and, as a first step toward meeting the state's child poverty reduction targets, passage of A.3146 to expand and strengthen the Empire State Child Credit. These actions would put New York on track to turning the tide on child poverty.

CHILD WELFARE

The child welfare system serves children and families facing significant challenges. The system includes the Statewide Central Register (SCR), child protective services, preventive services, foster care, and adoption/post-adoption. The responsibilities placed upon the child welfare system are enormous and profound, and adequate resources are required if the system is to fulfill them.

2018 saw the passage of groundbreaking federal legislation: the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). This law makes prevention a priority while at the same time aiming to strengthen foster care supports for children who need it. FFPSA provides states and tribes the opportunity to use federal Title IV-E funding – the principal source of funding for child welfare services – to support mental health, substance use disorder treatment, and parenting programs that help keep families intact and out of the child welfare system. FFPSA encourages the placement of youth in family-based settings while reserving placements in group home care for children in need of clinical services. This federal law presents New York with a tremendous opportunity to bolster its preventive services and strengthen family-based foster care services. October 2021 marks New York's first deadline by which it must fully meet requirements of the law to ensure that children who must be in foster care are placed with kin or in a family-based setting whenever possible, and congregate care settings are only used when clinically necessary.

STRENGTHEN THE FAMILY FIRST TRANSITION FUND

The **Executive Budget** proposes level funding for the Family First Transition Fund, at $3 million, which supports counties' efforts around recruiting and supporting foster and kinship families in preparation for implementation of the new Family First Prevention Services Act. We applaud and support this proposal and urge the State to disburse the funds expeditiously, and in a flexible manner to better meet the needs of all counties.

The Family First Transition Fund is a crucial resource for improving state and local policies and practices related to recruiting, retaining and strengthening foster and kinship families and evaluating current use of residential care. The program was implemented in 2019, and has helped many counties undertake important steps to reduce their reliance on congregate care, and strengthen their kin and family-based care in preparation for New York's full implementation of the federal Family First Preventive Services Act. However, some counties have been unable to make use of the funds because of structural barriers. One challenge for some smaller counties is that the allotment they received was too small to be useful, i.e., insufficient to cover the costs of a full-time employee to expand the county's kin outreach and support services. Another barrier faced by some counties has been that the funds are reimbursement-based. With counties facing tremendous fiscal challenges due to the pandemic, many have struggled to front funds.

Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to maintain the Executive's $3 million for the Family First Transition Fund and recommends that the new funds be combined with unspent funds from last year and the allocation methodology and allowable use of funds be retooled to make sure they are useful for counties preparing for Family First implementation. Retooling could include allowing counties to draw down funds before expending them and allowing counties to join together to pool the somewhat limited resources and, for example, hire jointly for a shared position.

STRENGTHEN PREVENTIVE SERVICES – INCLUDING IN COMMUNITY-BASED PRIMARY PREVENTION – TO KEEP FAMILIES STRONG AND INTACT

Preventive services are resources provided to families that can allow children to remain safely at home by targeting the problems that are known to drive abuse and neglect, including substance use, mental health issues, poverty, housing instability and lack of parenting skills.

The federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) allows states to seek federal reimbursement for **evidence-based preventive services**. To take advantage of this aspect of the law, each state needs to affirmatively opt into the prevention provisions, and take steps to prepare for implementation, including by expanding the evidence-based services available in the state. We are pleased that New York is developing a 5-year plan to opt into these provisions.[8]

Unfortunately, the **Executive Budget** contains a proposal that weakens New York's preventive services, rather than strengthens them. Specifically, the **Budget** proposes to reduce the preventive, protective, independent living, adoption, and aftercare services funding line by $30.5 million to $579.6 million (5%).

Like last year, the **Budget** proposes shifting $40 million from the TANF Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS) to be spent on child welfare services. This shift continues to concern us:

1. For a second year, this $40 million reduction of FFFS funding will mean that counties will have to cut or eliminate programs currently relying on these funds if they cannot find other ways to sustain them. By definition, these funds have had to be invested in social services programs supporting low-income seniors and families, like senior services, and child care. Accordingly, those are the types of programs that counties will likely have to cut.
2. This shift will also leave counties with fewer dollars available to draw down preventive services, which could result in an overall cut in preventive services – again at exactly the time New York should be bolstering its preventive services.

The **Executive Budget** also, once again, reduces the State share of preventive funding to 62% from 65% (as is written in statute). Localities use this open-ended, matched funding stream to pay for services that include child protective services and services to prevent children from entering, or re-entering, foster care.

The **Executive Budget** proposes to consolidate and cut Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS) programs, currently funded at $12.1 million, and the Supervision and Treatment Services for Juveniles Program (STSJP), currently funded at $8.4 million. The total funds for both programs are $16.4 million, which represents a cut of $4.1 million (20%) from last year's Enacted Budget. COPS funds primary prevention services – available to families without an imminent risk of entering foster care – which include group parenting skills education, general community-wide education, school-based and "therapeutic" programs, and home visiting. STSJPs are prevention, supervision and treatment programs for youth at-risk of entering or in juvenile justice.

The State should expand its investment in primary prevention, like COPS. A more strategic approach to prevention would make services available further upstream, before there is any documented risk of entry into foster care.

The **Budget** proposes to require counties to establish differential response programs that serve as alternatives to Child Protective Services (CPS) for certain allegations of maltreatment. The Family Assessment Response (FAR) process is a differential response model that can be a helpful resource for families. FAR is a preventive, solution-focused option for families to partner with CPS to keep their children safely at home. Currently, 21 of the 62 counties across New York State currently use FAR.[9] Enactment of this proposal would expand the use of FAR statewide by 2024, making the process more accessible for New York families.

Schuyler Center urges the State to restore the 5% cuts to preventive services, restore funds transferred from FFFS to preventive services, re-assume the 65% State share, as provided in statute, and reserve that increased funding for community-based primary prevention services that reach families before there is a risk of removal to foster care.

We also urge the State to reconsider the consolidation and reduction to COPS and STSJPs as it will likely lead to fewer families being served at a time when more families and youth are facing significant stress, and the State is preparing for federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) implementation.

Finally, we request the Legislature to maintain the Executive's proposal to expand the use of FAR statewide.

RESTORE FUNDING TO THE FOSTER CARE BLOCK GRANT

The **Executive Budget** cuts funding of the Foster Care Block Grant by $11.2 million to $372.3 million as compared to last year.

Counties use the Foster Care Block Grant to pay for foster care and the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) (a subsidized guardianship that supports and enables kin to provide a permanent home to relative children who cannot live safely with their parents). A reduced block grant means that counties assume a higher share of spending for their foster care systems. This cut comes just five years after the state imposed a deep cut to the Block Grant of $62 million in 2017-2018. In the best of times, county child welfare systems already operate on tight budgets, leaving them to carry out one of the most sensitive and important government functions – investigating cases of child abuse and assuming custody for those children unsafe in their parents' care – with insufficient resources. Due to the impacts of the pandemic, counties are facing tighter budgets than ever.

Further, sufficient foster care and KinGAP funding is essential as the State prepares for full implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Prevention Act in 2021, which, among other things, requires states to strengthen and expand its family-based foster care and kin options so children are not placed in congregate care settings unless clinically necessary**.**

Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to restore funding to the Foster Care Block Grant to 2016-2017 levels so counties have resources needed to provide quality services to the children and young people in their care.

STRENGTHEN THE HOUSING SUBSIDY FOR FOSTER FAMILIES AND YOUTH

Each year, approximately 1,300 youth age out of foster care.[10] As many as one-third of youth who age out of foster care experience homelessness, and many more experience unstable housing arrangements. Currently, youth and families involved in the child welfare system may receive a housing subsidy of up to $300 per month to help stabilize their housing.

In 2019, the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed into law, legislation clarifying that young people who receive this subsidy should not be precluded from living with roommates. This was an important reform, given the high costs of housing, and the importance of community and positive relationships for all young people, including those transitioning from foster care.

However, more policy changes are necessary to enable young people and families involved in the child welfare system to utilize the subsidy. First and foremost, the housing subsidy allowance must be increased. This amount has not changed since 1988. However, the cost of housing is substantially higher: the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in New York City is $3,000 per month,[11] and New York State's median monthly gross residential rent is $1,240 per household.[12] Given these high costs, a $300 monthly subsidy is not sufficient to stabilize the housing of youth or families in most cases.

Another barrier to utilization is that the subsidy is only available to youth until they reach age 21. Because New York extends foster care until age 21, this means that youth aging out of the system are unable to avail themselves of the benefit to assist them in their transition to independent living.

Schuyler Center urges the State to increase the monthly foster care housing subsidy to reflect current housing costs and increase the upper age limit of eligibility from 21 to 24 so that youth who age out of foster care at age 21 can avail themselves of the subsidy program for up to 3 years.

STRENGTHEN THE FOSTER YOUTH COLLEGE SUCCESS INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE IN PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION

Only two to seven percent of foster youth complete a two- or four-year degree. Yet, the best way to ensure that a youth will secure and retain good-paying employment in adulthood is a college education.[13]

The **Executive Budget** proposes $6 million in funding for the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYSI) to support youth in foster care to pursue higher education to graduation. This represents level funding compared to last year's final budget. This $6 million supports hundreds of new students through successful completion of their course of study. More youth avail themselves of FYSI support each year, and this is a good thing.

Schuyler Center asks the Legislature to maintain the Executive's proposed $6 million to support youth pursuing higher education who either are or have been in foster care.

STRENGTHEN KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP ASSISTANCE (KINGAP) BY FUNDING IT AS A PERMANENCY OPTION OUTSIDE OF THE FOSTER CARE BLOCK GRANT

A relative is a preferred caregiver for children who are removed from their birth parents because such placements help to maintain connections to family and culture. The State should provide robust funding for programs that support families willing to step in and care for young relatives when the parents cannot.

The **Executive Budget** continues to fund the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) through the Foster Care Block Grant (FCBG), diverting scarce funds from critical programs that aid foster youth (FCBG), to fund an important program that is not foster care, but a permanency option (KinGAP). This diversion of funds is particularly problematic given the sharp cuts to the Foster Care Block Grant in 2017-2018. In 2011, New York implemented KinGAP using funds from the FCBG, with the intent to use the FCBG for a period of just one year, but KinGAP continues to be funded through the limited block grant. Although the number of children in foster care has declined, the health and service needs of the children who are in care are significant and costly. The FCBG funds must be preserved to meet their needs.

Relatives in approved or certified foster care settings can apply for KinGAP when both adoption and family reunification are ruled out. Many of these families need financial assistance to continue caring for a foster child in their home. With this option, kin families can exit the foster care system and continue to receive financial support while still caring for the relative child.

Schuyler Center urges the State to fund the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program as an uncapped permanency option outside of the Foster Care Block Grant to incentivize more counties to use this important permanency option.

RESTORE FUNDING FOR KINSHIP CAREGIVER SERVICES AND THE KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAM

Hundreds of thousands of children in New York are in informal kinship arrangements,[14] and a significant number of children enter into direct custody arrangements with kin.[15] In direct custody arrangements, relatives care for children outside of the foster care system, without financial support. Kinship Caregiver programs offer important supports and services to kin, a majority of whom are grandparents, who care for their relatives' children in their household outside of the formal foster care program, and often with extremely limited resources. Relative caretaker programs provide information about family members' rights, support to meet children's education and health care needs, and assistance with obtaining health and social service benefits. For as little as $510 per child per year, these programs are far less costly than foster care placement.

The Kinship Navigator is a statewide resource and referral network for kinship families, providing information and connections to important resources.

The **Executive Budget** proposes funding for kinship caregiver services at $322,000. This is 5% less than what the Governor proposed last year and a significant cut from last year's final budget. Last year, the Assembly added $950,000, half of its additions compared to previous years.

The Executive Budget proposes $210,000 in funding for the statewide Kinship Navigator information and referral network. This is 5% less than what the Governor proposed last year along with a cut of the $100,000 the Assembly added to last year's budget.

Schuyler Center requests that the Legislature restore funding for Kinship Caregiver programs to $2.2 million by adding $1.9 million and restore funding for the Kinship Navigator Program to $310,000 by adding $100,000 to ensure the maintenance of kinship support services in the coming year.

FUND POST-PERMANENCY SERVICES

The **Executive Budget** includes an investment of $11.8 million in funding that comes from adoption assistance savings, for post-permanency (including adoption and guardianship) services. This includes $3 million for the Family First Transition Fund. This amounts to a $1.2 million increase compared to last year's final budget. The State's responsibility to children in foster care and families should not end if a child is adopted. Many children in foster care have significant emotional, mental, and behavioral health issues due to childhood trauma, and therefore require additional services and supports. Adoptive parents who are unable to find the appropriate supports their child and family needs may be forced to dissolve their family and place their child in foster care, which hurts families and is more costly to the state.

Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to maintain the Executive's $11.8 million for post-adoption services.

EARLY CARE AND LEARNING

It is widely recognized that the earliest years of a child's life are extremely important for health, development, and learning that can last a lifetime. A strong early start is a major predictor of future success and is particularly important to mitigate disparities in health, education, and other long-term outcomes.[16]

RELEASE THE GOVERNOR'S CHILD CARE AVAILABILITY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLEMENT THEM IN THE 2021-2022 BUDGET, AND INCREASE INVESTMENT TO STABILIZE THE CHILD CARE SECTOR AND SET NEW YORK ON A PATH TO PROVIDING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO QUALITY CHILD CARE

New York's Child Care Landscape

New York's child care system was in crisis before the pandemic hit. High-quality child care has long been the largest monthly bill for families with children, costing on average $2,047 per month ($24,564 per year) for two children in a child care center in 2019. This cost is prohibitively expensive for many working families. Indeed, applying federal guidance, which pegs affordability at no more than 7% of family income, child care is unaffordable for nearly all New York families. Under this standard, to "afford" the annual cost of center-based care, a family with two children in center-based care, the family would need an annual income of $350,914. (For perspective: median income in NYS for family of 4 is $100,377.)[17] Yet, due to under-investment in child care for low-income families, it is estimated that fewer than 20% of eligible low-income families who could benefit from receiving child care subsidy assistance from New York State receive it.[18]

The challenges facing New York families and the child care sector as we enter 2021 cannot be overstated. The COVID-19 economic downturn has left New York families facing mounting economic insecurity due to reduced hours and furloughs. Women are being forced to reduce work hours or drop out of the workforce in great numbers to care for children unable to attend in-person school or child care, adding more pressure to family finances. Yet, at this critical moment for families, many may be forced to withdraw their children from quality care because counties cannot extend pandemic subsidy supports that allowed many to waive family co-pays for child care and expand child care subsidy support to more families due to lack of funding.[19] This could cause clear negative impacts for parents, children, child care providers, and local economies.

At the same time, just as the state is gearing up for recovery – and getting New Yorkers back to work, New York's child care sector is teetering on the edge of collapse. New York's child care providers – who struggle to cover costs when operating at 100% capacity – have been averaging 40% of capacity since March.[20] More than 60% are losing money each month; the same percentage report having taken on personal debt or dipped into personal savings to cover shortfalls.[21] Child care educators who, in the best of times, struggle to sustain their families on low wages, have faced tremendous challenges as the pandemic has caused many providers to reduce staff or shut down altogether. The median wage for a child care worker in New York in 2019 was $28,246 per year, or $13.58 an hour.[22] Many of these low-wage essential workers have continued to provide care throughout the pandemic, often at great personal risk to themselves and their families.

Child Care in the Executive Budget

Governor Cuomo recognized in his State of the State address the extraordinary challenges the pandemic has caused the child care sector and the families that rely on it. His words were powerful: "[w]e saw the lack of access to affordable child care disrupt low-income families and force caregivers, primarily women, to choose between putting food on the table and caring for their children." These words capture the pain the lack of child care access has caused too many families during the pandemic – and long before. They also acknowledge the vital role we *know* child care providers – as small businesses predominantly owned and operated by women and overwhelmingly women of color – play in the lives of the working families they serve in their communities. Unfortunately, this **Executive Budget** does not rise to meet these extraordinary challenges.

It also fails to capitalize on what is, oddly enough, a moment of opportunity. The Governor's Child Care Availability Task Force, on which Schuyler Center serves, is due to release what we expect will be an ambitious set of recommendations to dramatically expand access to high-quality child care and pay child care educators fair wages that reflect the importance of their work. And, while the economic challenges facing the state right now are significant, New York has been awarded substantial federal relief funds earmarked for child care – nearly $450 million are on their way, on top of earlier CARES Act child care relief funds, some still unspent. And, with many leaders in Washington recognizing that the nation cannot recover without child care, there is a real possibility that more federal child care relief dollars will be coming to New York in a future federal COVID-19 relief package.

Instead, this **Executive Budget** marks the fourth since Governor Cuomo signed the Task Force Legislation into law without meaningful new investment in child care, or transformative proposals. What this **Budget** includes is **flat funding for child care subsidies at $832 million.** The State general fund investment is $229 million, just above the minimum needed to draw down full federal Child Care Community Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds. $166.8 million of the total is federal CCDBG funds rolled over from FY 2020. The **Executive Budget** reduces TANF funds investment in child care as compared to last year by almost $200 million; it is unclear where those TANF funds have been shifted.

The **Executive Budget** proposes taking some small, but positive steps toward creating a more uniform, equitable, accessible child care system. The **Executive Budget** invests $40 million to strengthen New York's child care subsidy system by lowering co-pays for families that receive them to no more than 20% of income over the federal poverty level, and $6 million for start-up grants to help reduce child care deserts – census tracts in New York State where there are more than 50 children under age five and either very few or no programs to serve them. It also removes red tape and redundant requirements. Of concern: these initiatives appear to be funded by CCDBG funds reappropriated from last year, and come out of the flat $832 million of funding. This could mean that the state will have to offset these higher costs by reducing the number of families receiving subsidies.

Finally, while the federal stimulus funds are accounted for in a line reserved for the expenditure of additional federal funding made available to recover from public health emergencies, the **Executive Budget** contains no plan for how they will be used.

Schuyler Center, and the Empire State Campaign for Child Care and Winning Beginning NY – two statewide early childhood coalitions we help lead – request:

- **The Governor release the Child Care Availability Task Force recommendations without any further delays and draw from the more than $450 million in federal child care relief funds New York has received and not committed from the CARES Act and the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 in a manner that both addresses the pandemic-related emergency needs of child care providers and working families, and strategically implements the Task Force recommendations.[23]**
  - It is essential that the State begin investing these federal funds now, **before the release of the enacted budget**, because families and child care providers cannot wait any longer for help. To ensure these funds will be used in a way to effectively meet the urgent needs of the child care sector and families, and build toward a stronger more equitable system, the State must bring families and providers into the planning. As a starting point, we have developed a plan, informed by a range of stakeholders and national experts, and which draws on lessons learned from the state's flawed use of the last round of (CARES Act) child care stimulus funds.
- **The Legislature and Governor incorporate the Task Force recommendations within the final 2021-2022 New York State Budget, and include increased investment of $485 million in child care, drawing from remaining emergency federal funds, ongoing federal CCDBG, TANF and existing and new State investments to further implement these recommendations, build toward sustainability, and this year take real steps toward equitably expanding access to quality child care to families most sharply impacted by the pandemic, and to stabilizing the sector.**

EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN EVIDENCE-BASED HOME VISITING

Maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting is recognized across the nation as a uniquely effective approach to family strengthening, with myriad benefits to children and families' health, well-being and economic security. Home visiting has been proven to improve birth outcomes;[24] increase high school graduation rates for children who received home visiting services while young; increase workforce participation and lower rates of welfare dependency.[25,26,27]

The pandemic has increased the need for home visiting services as new families are isolated and stressed. Home visiting services can also be a method of addressing the racial disparities highlighted by the pandemic. Yet, New York State has for years failed to make a substantial investment in these programs. As a result, fewer than three percent of New York children aged zero to three live in communities with access to home visiting.

Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to increase State investment in home visiting to maintain existing programs and expand services to more families. Specifically, to support home visiting programs and infrastructure, we request the following investments:

- Invest $2 million for ParentChild+ to support sustainability at existing sites;

- Restore the OCFS/Public Private Partnership grant to restore $1.3 million for two Parents as Teachers (PAT) sites in Rochester;
- Restore $1 million for Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) to provide a total of $3.4 million to support sustainability at existing sites;
- Maintain $26.2 million for Healthy Families New York (HFNY) to support sustainability at existing sites; and
- Restore $602,000 to the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation (MECF) to support community-based programs serving children, families, and expectant parents across NYS.

STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND ACCESS TO QUALITY AFTER SCHOOL SERVICES

High-quality after school programs provide children and youth with safe, enriching care after school. The importance of after school programs for the well-being our children has become even more apparent during this time of deep uncertainty and stress brought on by the pandemic.

The **Executive Budget** again proposes $28,041,000 for Advantage After School, $5 million less than last year's final budget of $33 million. If the funding is not restored, 2,500 to 5,000 participants will lose their current Advantage After School programs. The Executive Proposal provides level funding for the Empire State After School Program.

Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to restore $5 million to the Advantage After School Program, and dedicate a percentage of new revenue streams to increase access to affordable high-quality after school, summer, and expanded learning programs.

Schuyler Center joins our partner, the New York State Network for Youth Success, in asking the Legislature to add funding of $250,000 for the NYS Network for Youth Success to sustain the mobilization and coordination of high-quality expanded learning programs to help after school programs respond adequately to family needs, and include budget language that provides flexibility for programs to adapt in times of an emergency.

A RECOVERY THAT CENTERS ALL NEW YORK CHILDREN

As New York turns the corner to pandemic recovery, we urge the Legislature and the Governor to pass a 2021-2022 Budget that centers our children; prioritizes those communities hit hardest by the pandemic, and the essential workers who saw us through; and uses this moment of rebuilding as an opportunity to build back the systems upon which children and families and all New Yorkers rely to be aligned, coordinated, well-resourced and anti-racist.

Thank you. We appreciate the opportunity to present testimony and look forward to continuing to work with you to build a strong New York.

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