This fall, New York began implementing the federal Family First Prevention Services Act ("Family First"), creating an opportunity for the state to make strides toward transforming its child welfare system into one that is intentionally anti-racist, and committed to ensuring family self-determination and strengthening community-based services that meet the needs of New York’s diverse communities. At the same time, New York State’s prevention services statute is up for reauthorization, presenting an opportunity in New York to expand investment in family support. The Coalition’s 2022 Priorities frame three budget and legislative issues in this urgent new context.

**Issue #1: Authorize Essential Child Welfare Funding and Invest 65% State Support for Preventive Services**

New York State currently invests state dollars in services for families to avoid deeper child welfare system involvement and to support children remaining safely in their homes. This open-ended state reimbursement funding has contributed to the **59% reduction of children in foster care since 2010** through supports including housing assistance, child care, clinical services, home visiting, transportation, job training, education, and emergency cash grants. Many of these kinds of resources are not eligible for federal reimbursement under Family First, making it a crucial state budget issue.

The enabling legislation for this important investment in family supports (SSL 153-k) is subject to a sunset provision this year, and **New York State must reauthorize the statute and restore state funding at 65% to meet the full potential of its purpose by budgeting for the state share for these costs.** In state statute, the requirement is 65% funding, yet since 2008, the state has consistently reduced its share of reimbursement for these essential services to 62% each year—forcing counties to absorb a larger share of costs of serving families and children outside of foster care. The FY2023 state budget must restore the reimbursement rate required under the original law.

Preventive services are more important now than ever as New York recovers from the extreme financial and community impacts caused by COVID. State-funded prevention is necessary to continue to build a broad continuum of ways to support family well-being.
Issue #2: Creating Independent Funding For KinGAP So More Children Live With Family

The trauma that children separated from their family and placed in foster care experience can be mitigated when they are placed with family, preferably with relatives or someone with whom they have an existing relationship. The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) provides long-term support so children can leave foster care and live with kin. As more children in foster care are placed with relatives, KinGAP will become an increasingly important resource for achieving permanency.

KinGAP is under-utilized across the state. In 2019, there were 7,058 children in foster care with a relative, but only 526 (7%) children statewide left foster care via KinGAP. About 69% of those were in New York City. KinGAP is one proven strategy to reduce the over-representation of Black and brown New York children in foster care and to strengthen families. KinGAP also can reduce the amount of time children stay in foster care, and reduce the likelihood they will “age out” of care. When youth age out of foster care without returning to their family or having another form of permanency, they face devastating outcomes in education, employment, housing and justice-involvement, all of which disproportionately impact youth of color. New York State must invest in proven strategies, like KinGAP, that can prevent youth from exiting the system without permanent family supports.

There is a clear opportunity to expand the use of KinGAP across the state. To do this, New York should fund KinGAP outside of the Foster Care Block Grant. To provide an avenue to permanency with kin for more children in foster care, New York State must invest $25 million to establish an independent and open-ended funding stream for KinGAP outside of the Foster Care Block Grant. This new funding line should not reduce funding for the Foster Care Block Grant.
The goal of the child welfare housing subsidy program is to stabilize housing for families and prevent family separation and child removals, expedite reunification of children in foster care, and help youth aging out of foster care who face high risk of housing instability and homelessness. Under this existing program, families with open CPS investigations, families receiving preventive services, families of children reunifying from foster care, and youth ages 18 through 21 are eligible for the housing subsidy through their local department of social services (LDSS). LDSSs are currently authorized to provide eligible families and youth with a housing subsidy of up to $300 per month for up to three years or until reaching the limit of $10,800.

The subsidy amount has not changed since it was created in 1988, although the law was recently amended to clarify that the subsidy can be used by families and youth living with roommates. With housing costs having increased exponentially since 1988, the low dollar amount has rendered the subsidy largely ineffective at achieving its intended purpose of stabilizing housing for child welfare system-involved families and young adults aging out of foster care. Moreover, while there are new federal housing vouchers and new state rent subsidies being funded by federal pandemic stimulus and recovery funds, many of those funding streams are temporary.

**New York must prioritize new housing resources for families and older youth and increase the child welfare housing subsidy from $300 to $725/month and raise the total funds available to $26,100 ($725/month for a maximum of 36 months) as an additional resource counties can use when other housing subsidies are unavailable or as a bridge while families or youth are waiting to receive other longer term housing subsidies. NYS must also build-in ongoing automatic increases to the subsidy, tying it to inflation, to ensure it meaningfully supports families as cost of living rises.**

Rent subsidies are more critical now than ever as families face great threats to their housing security as a result of deepened economic hardship due to the COVID-19 crisis. Housing resources are also critical for older youth leaving foster care. According to NY’s Foster Youth Success Alliance, nearly 25% of older youth were facing or fearing housing instability during the COVID pandemic last year. The child welfare housing subsidy can serve as a critical tool to securing housing along with other statewide housing supports.