



Child and Family Advocates' Statement on the 2023-24 New York State Budget

Historic update to the child welfare housing subsidy

As a statewide group of advocates, providers, and people impacted by New York's child welfare system, we are encouraged that this year's state budget includes a historic update to the child welfare housing subsidy. Starting next year, the child welfare housing subsidy will increase from \$300 a month to \$725 a month, a long overdue update for a subsidy that has not been increased since it was established in 1988.

By raising the child welfare housing subsidy, our leaders have strengthened one of the crucial concrete supports the child welfare system can provide to families involved in the system and youth who are transitioning out of the system into independent life. We have long fought for this expansion and commend Governor Hochul and legislative leaders for taking this first step toward ensuring that this subsidy provides meaningful support in relation to New York's high cost of living.

However, this year's budget does not make as much progress on additional child welfare priorities:

- **To make the child welfare housing subsidy as strong as possible, leaders must index the monthly amount to inflation and expand the subsidy to include youth until age 24.** Currently, the subsidy's maximum age for youth in foster care is 21, meaning youth who age out of care at age 21 cannot access the subsidy, at a moment when they need it.
- **This year's budget does not restore child welfare Preventive Services funding to the 65% reimbursement rate required by statute.** This open-ended funding was established in 1980 with a 75% reimbursement rate. To ensure that the housing subsidy and other preventive services are used to the full extent, leaders must ensure that services are funded at a 75% reimbursement rate, in statute and budget.
- **This year's State budget includes a 4% cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) for people who provide human services and mental health care that support and strengthen families.** Not only is this lower than last year's COLA (5.4%), it is less than half of the 8.5% workers—55% of whom are women of color—have repeatedly stated is needed to keep pace with inflation. Leaders must ensure that our human services workforce are paid fair wages.
- **This year's budget does not include a Child and Family Wellbeing Fund,** which would support community-based, community-chosen, and community-led investments focused on communities with the highest levels of contacts with the child welfare system. Leaders must ensure community-focused supports are prioritized.

- **The budget does not increase funding for the Foster Youth College Success Initiative, which provides support to youth with foster care experience who are in college.** Leaders must ensure that this program continues to grow as outreach improves and new cohorts start college.

Post-Budget Actions

For the remaining weeks of this Legislative Session, we will continue to advocate for policies that center New York's children, families, and communities involved in and impacted by the child welfare system:

- **Expand the Child Welfare Housing Subsidy to include youth up to age 24** – A.2525-A (Hevesi)/S.2038-A (Brisport)
- **Informed Consent for Drug Testing Parents and Babies** – A.109 (Rosenthal)/S.320 (Salazar): Requires medical care providers to seek the informed consent of pregnant people and new mothers before they or their babies are drug tested. Black women are drug tested disproportionately, which leads to disproportionate calls to the State Central Register, and sometimes to family separation at or near birth. Informed consent is already in effect in New York City's public hospitals.
- **Family Miranda Rights** – A.1980 (Walker)/S.901 (Brisport): Requires caseworkers to advise parents and caregivers of their rights at first contact. Ensuring that parents and caregivers have access to their rights during a Child Protection Services (CPS) investigation will empower parents to make informed decisions for their family and will make CPS investigations less traumatizing for the whole family.
- **Anti-Harassment in Reporting** – A.2479 (Hevesi)/S.902 (Brisport): Requires reporters to the State Central Register (SCR) to provide their name and contact information, which can only be accessed by the Office of Children and Family Services and counties, to prevent reports being used as a form of harassment. Black children are nearly twice as likely as white children to be reported to the SCR. False anonymous reports are often used as a form of harassment.