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Addressing child poverty will help all Long Islanders



As her second proposal for the 2025 State of the State, Governor Kathy Hochul today proposed a historic expansion of New York's child tax credit for more than 2.75 million children. Governor Hochul's plan would give 1.6 million New York families an annual tax credit of up to \$1,000 per child under age four and up to \$500 per child from four through sixteen. Credit: Don Pollard

By Louise Skolnik

Guest essay

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This guest essay reflects the views of Louise Skolnik, professor emeritus of social work at Adelphi University and former Nassau County director of human services and deputy commissioner of the county's Department of Social Services.

This might come as a surprise: New York has a higher child poverty rate than 38 other states. Nearly 1 in 5 children in our state are in families with annual household incomes at or below the federal thresholds that define poverty and eligibility for many assistance programs. The poverty line is based on the number of family

members. For example, it is a \$21,621 annual income for a family of two; \$31,922 for a family of four. While Nassau and Suffolk counties have child poverty rates lower than other parts of the state, this federal standard does not consider what it costs to live and raise a family on the Island.

A 2024 report from the United Way indicates that to adequately meet basic needs, a Long Island family of four required an annual income of more than \$100,000. This is more than three times the official federal poverty line, which was determined before the most recent inflationary period. The same report calculated that more than 316,000 Long Island households fall below the income threshold needed to live and work here.

These figures suggest that child poverty on Long Island is significantly undercounted and cannot be ignored. No matter where we reside, we are all, as taxpayers and caring citizens, affected by child poverty's costly social and economic consequences. Studies consistently document poverty's negative impact on children's physical and mental health, and educational success. Moreover, the longer individuals experience poverty as a child, the more likely they will experience poverty and its damaging effects in adulthood.

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Gov. Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature have demonstrated a bipartisan commitment to address this critical issue. In 2021, the New York State Child Poverty Reduction Act was enacted with the goal of reducing child poverty by half by 2031. It established the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council to recommend strategies for reaching this target. Among the Council's recommendations is expanding New York's child tax credit.

Providing families with more disposable income has proved to be effective in decreasing poverty, with cost-saving impacts persisting far into the future. This is the goal of expanding the Empire State Child Credit, to help low- and middle-income families with children under the age of 17 retain more of their earnings. In 2024, the credit was modified to include children under the age of 4; this year, the governor's 2025 budget proposal would increase the number of families covered and the dollar amount of the credit.

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During this period of inflation, it is even more critical that Hochul's proposal be enacted and strengthened. More cash means families do not have to choose between paying for child care or rent, between providing nutritious food or filling a prescription, between new shoes for growing feet or a warm coat.

In my 50 years as a social worker, I have witnessed repeatedly how poverty can threaten the well-being of families. I also saw how resourceful and resilient families are. One motivating force was shared with me over and over again: the hope for a better future for their children. We have the opportunity right now to help this dream be realized for many more of our neighbors. Let's expand the child tax credit now. All Long Islanders will benefit.

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