

2026 Top Policy Priorities for Child and Family Wellbeing

During the 2026 New York State Legislative Session, Schuyler Center will prioritize policies and investments that **improve health, wellbeing, and economic security of New York’s families, children, and communities, with a focus on New Yorkers who are working hard to make ends meet.** While New York has made a statutory commitment to cut child poverty in half by 2032, the rate of children experiencing poverty across New York State remains high, with over 18% of all New York children experiencing poverty. Further, recent and pending federal actions have eliminated or weakened services that New York families rely on in times of need. **This means it is more important than ever for New York leaders to act boldly and with urgency to advance policies and investments proven to reduce child poverty, strengthen families, and set up New York children to thrive.**

Goal 1 *Family Economic Security — Effectively implement and expand existing policies and adopt new approaches to reduce child poverty and racial inequity statewide*

- ▶ **Strengthen New York’s child tax credit and make sure all eligible children receive it:**
 - Invest in outreach and assistance to ensure all eligible New York families can easily file their taxes and access the newly-expanded Empire State Child Credit.
 - Build on the 2025 expansion of the Empire State Child Credit to one that is:
 - Permanent and indexed to inflation
 - Includes 17-year-olds (currently excluded from the credit)
 - At least \$1,500 per child per year, as recommended by the NYS Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council
- ▶ **Expand access to food and nutritional supports:**
 - Secure a State investment to provide food benefits to all income-eligible New Yorkers who are excluded from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) due to their immigration status.
 - Provide resources to transition SNAP benefits to a secure chip card to help prevent the theft of SNAP benefits from New Yorkers who rely on them.
 - Ensure the NYS budget includes \$30 million in funding to help WIC programs meet increased need and serve more children and families.
- ▶ **Stabilize housing and reduce costs by expanding, making permanent, and ensuring robust implementation of the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP), currently established as a pilot.** HAVP is a state-funded voucher, much like the federal Section 8 program, for people experiencing homelessness and low-income tenants facing eviction.

- ▶ **Double the maximum cash assistance allowance and remove barriers to accessing public assistance.** Basic Allowance grant amounts have not changed since 2012, providing a family of two (parent and one child) just \$252 per month, plus \$39.50 for utility expenses. Doubling the allowance would decrease child poverty in New York State by 18 percent.

Goal 2

Child Care — *Take substantial strides toward achieving statewide universal child care.*

- ▶ **Provide ongoing and reliable compensation supplements to all members of the child care workforce.**
 - Create a permanent state fund to increase child care worker compensation (S.5533 (Brisport)/A.492 (Hevesi)). This fund should be robustly resourced and sufficient to offer all members of the child care workforce a significant boost in income; and
 - Develop a plan for subsequent years to establish a minimum pay scale and career ladder based on agreed-upon criteria to inform compensation supplement levels after the base pay scale for all has been increased.
- ▶ **Adequately resource New York’s Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to ensure no eligible families are turned away or placed on waitlists.**
 - Secure additional, sustained funding for child care assistance (CCAP) to end the enrollment closures and waitlists. This funding must be ongoing, not one-time funding, because demand for CCAP is steadily growing, and families must be able to rely on ongoing support to balance their budgets.
- ▶ **Implement two models of universal child care bridge projects in several communities around the state, to be expanded to more communities until free, universal child care is achieved statewide.**
 - **Community eligibility projects.** This model would make child care fully free and available to all families with children in communities where a significant number of families with low income reside. Families would not be subject to income, work or immigration status tests.
 - **Capped-fee projects.** All families in a project community could access child care through this project at a cost of \$100 a week (\$20/day) without being subjected to income, work, or immigration status tests. Families would also have the option of applying for CCAP; if eligible, their family co-pays under CCAP would be less.

Goal 3

Children’s Health — *Expand and increase investment in child and family health.*

- ▶ **Support New York State’s efforts to protect public health and maintain health coverage and access to care for all New York residents, wherever they were born.** This includes building and strengthening streamlined processes for enrollment and renewal and ensuring federal Medicaid work reporting and other requirements are understandable, navigable, and mitigate unintended disenrollment.

- ▶ **Ensure robust coverage and access to preventive and remediation services for children and families**, with a particular focus on behavioral health and dyadic/family-oriented care.
- ▶ **Improve children’s oral health by strengthening the oral health workforce.** This includes assisting parents in preventing dental disease by allowing them to apply fluoride varnish to their children’s teeth under the supervision of a dental professional (S.6759 Fernandez/A. 8145 Peoples-Stokes) and allowing medical assistants to apply fluoride varnish.
- ▶ **Meet the needs of infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities by increasing investment in the Early Intervention (EI) workforce and conducting a comprehensive review of the EI program** (A.283 Paulin/S.1222A Rivera).

Goal 4 Child Welfare — *Transform child welfare by supporting families and communities.*

- ▶ **Establish the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund with \$30 million**, to invest resources in communities that have been historically disenfranchised and overrepresented in the child welfare system. At a moment when many New Yorkers are wary of interacting with the government, this fund will help ensure families and communities receive support from trusted community-based organizations.
- ▶ **Increase funding for legal services for children and families so New Yorkers involved in child welfare and immigration proceedings have timely access to quality legal representation**, which is critical for ensuring families stay safely together and gain access to supportive resources.
- ▶ **Require reporters to the State Central Register (SCR) to confidentially provide their name and contact information—accessible only by the Office of Children and Family Services and counties—** to prevent reports being used as a form of harassment. (A.2479-A (Hevesi)/S.902-B (Brisport)). ***This bill was passed by the Legislature and is awaiting action by the Governor.***
- ▶ **Require child protective services caseworkers to advise parents and caregivers of their rights at first contact** (A.1980-A (Walker)/S.901-A (Brisport)).
- ▶ **Require medical care providers to seek the informed consent of pregnant people and new mothers before they or their babies are drug tested** (A.109-B (Rosenthal)/S.320-B (Salazar)).