



December 18, 2025

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

The Child and Family Wellbeing Action Network is a statewide group of nearly 400 advocates, providers, and community members impacted by New York's child welfare system. Together, we advocate for a New York that prioritizes investing in and implementing policies that strengthen and support children, young people, and families. We urge you to include the following family-strengthening investments in your 2026-27 Executive Budget proposal:

Establish and fund the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund pilot at \$30 million in the upcoming state budget.

The vast majority of child welfare cases, [over 113,000](#) cases a year, are not reported for abuse but for other issues: symptoms of poverty such as housing, food, energy, or medical insecurity; experiencing domestic violence, mental health, or substance use struggles. The [Child and Family Wellbeing Fund](#) would make state resources available to trusted local organizations that are run by community members in neighborhoods all over New York State, specifically those experiencing the highest ratio of CPS involvement per 1,000 children in the state. The parents and young people impacted by New York's child welfare system have long called for dedicated state funding for community-driven resources to: invest in family wellbeing, improve neighborhood conditions, increase economic opportunity, eliminate poverty, and ensure that families can get support without the threat of unnecessary family separation through the child welfare system. At a moment when many New Yorkers are wary of interacting with the government due aggressive immigration enforcement and sweeping federal cuts to essential services, this fund will help ensure families and communities can receive support from trusted community-based organizations.

Fund early high-quality legal representation for families involved in Child Protective Services with \$50 million.

Access to legal representation during the investigation stage of a child protective services (CPS) case (often referred to as “timely defense” or pre-petition legal representation services) leads to better outcomes for families and children. Families are more likely to be connected to appropriate supportive services that strengthen families and improve child wellbeing; investigations conclude faster and with less traumatic impacts on families; and fewer children are unnecessarily separated from their families. Currently, only four NYS jurisdictions (New York City, Westchester County, Monroe County, and Erie County) offer timely legal representation, with impressive results. Between [2019 and 2023](#), timely defense programs in New York City prevented family court filings more than 80% of the time, and protected 90% of children exposed to investigations from entering foster care, with no negative impact on child safety. Parents in every county across New York State, in rural and urban communities, have the right to legal counsel from the earliest stages of a CPS case, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Expanding access to timely defense minimizes the continuation of unwarranted and costly system involvement. This request would fund a proposal developed by the Office of Court Administration.

Invest \$165 million for specialized legal support for young people and families subject to immigration enforcement.

New York’s child welfare system overlaps with families and young people involved in immigration proceedings, detainments, and deportations in devastating ways. From disrupting a young person with Special Immigrant Juvenile Status who is just starting to work and establish themselves, to separating families when parents are detained, each situation needs legal support. Access to quality legal representation is foundational to justice and stability for immigrant communities, and absolutely essential for families fighting to stay together. New York has long been the national leader in supporting legal services for immigrants, yet [more than 170,000](#) people in New York did not have a lawyer in immigration court in 2024. Every New Yorker deserves to have their rights upheld, including their right as a parent to make decisions on their child’s behalf. With federal immigration detentions of New Yorkers having already [surged](#), and the likelihood that far more will be subject to detention in the coming months, we join the New York Immigration Coalition and its Care for Immigrant Families campaign in calling for this [investment](#) knowing that having access to an attorney dramatically improves the chance that families will be kept together, and parental decisions respected.

With the federal government slashing health and human services that help families in time of need, and singling out immigrant New Yorkers for aggressive, non-targeted immigration enforcement and stripping them of access to even the most basic supports, we believe it is more urgent than ever for New York to stand up for our children, young people, and families. We look forward to working with you to ensure they are supported in these trying times.

Sincerely,

The Child and Family Wellbeing Action Network and undersigned partners:

Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Court Appointed Special Advocates of New York City (CASA-NYC)
Diverse Mosaic Community Center
Families Together in New York State
Family Ties of Westchester, Inc.
JMACforFAMILIES
NYC Family Policy Project
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
The Children's Agenda
Westchester Children's Association
Westchester Justice for Families

cc: Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, President Pro Tempore and Senate Majority Leader
Assemblymember Carl Heastie, Speaker of the Assembly
Senator Jabari Brisport, Chair Senate Committee for Children and Families
Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi, Chair Assembly Committee for Children and Families
Commissioner Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden, Office of Children and Family Services
Brian Mahanna, Counsel to the Governor
Karen Persichilli Keogh, Secretary to the Governor
Blake Washington, Budget Director
Emma Vadehra, Policy Director Governor Hochul
Peter Hatch, Deputy Secretary for Human Services and Mental Hygiene
Lisa Vasnani, Assistant Counsel to the Governor
Kenan Kurt, Assistant Counsel to the Governor

Avery Cohen, Assistant Secretary to the Governor for Human Services & Mental Hygiene

Jesse Olczak, Deputy Budget Director

Nichols Silbersack, Deputy Policy Director