

New York's Children:

Our Future Workforce

Hard times are harder on children

In this recession, working families are having a hard time meeting their children's basic needs. Family members are struggling to keep their jobs, a roof over their heads, food on the table, and gas in the car. They can't afford child care, school supplies, or health care co-pays (if they are lucky enough to have health insurance), much less provide for extras.

In New York State we have placed a strong emphasis on economic development. We must keep in mind that today's children, teens and young adults are our next generation of leaders, hard workers, and active citizens. New York can not achieve the economic development growth it wants without giving sufficient attention to its future workforce.

So, how does the future look? To many the answer is – NOT GOOD. One in five children lives in poverty as defined by a family income of \$21,200 for a family of four. And two in five live in low-income families. One out of three does not graduate from high school on time, a number that increases greatly in our cities. Over 150,000 families have been reported to the State Central Register out of concern that their children have experienced abuse or neglect. And over 400,000 children are not currently enrolled in a health insurance plan. We can and must do better.

The good news is we know how to support families going through tough times. We know that children need families who can nurture them; who can afford to pay for food, shelter and the necessities of life; and who can keep them safe. They need a safe place to get a quality education. They need health care and healthy environments. They need access to services for physical disabilities and mental health issues. Our children can not wait.

New York CAN's Agenda:

Create a **Children's Budget** to supplement the State Budget in order to assure the spending on services and programs to children and families leads to desired outcomes. Such an evaluation tool can highlight current priorities and emerging concerns, can inform the public and legislature, and will allow for more strategic allocation of funds.

A Children's Budget can serve as a guide for the decisions that need to be made in the state budget due to the economic downturn. A Children's Budget will provide clear evidence as to which programs and services are worthwhile investments deserving of additional attention. And it should point to those areas that are not working that should be cut.

New York CAN urges serious consideration be given to the needs of children and their families before cutting any programs and services. Across the board cuts disproportionately hurt our most vulnerable populations at a time when demand increases greatly. We ask that you **hold harmless funding for critical services or programs** for children. Further, we ask that there be **no across the board cuts** in the budget and that local **counties not be asked to cover a larger proportion of the costs**.

New York's Children and Families Need

- ❖ Universal health care, including access to high-quality health services.
- ❖ Economic security (living wage, earned income tax credit, and access to appropriate public programs including nutrition programs, cash assistance and other work supports).
- ❖ High-quality early care and education options for every child.
- ❖ Supports for parents to strengthen families and help them to nurture and care for their children.
- ❖ A strong education system that ensures children's success in school and life.
- ❖ After-school programs and other asset-building services.
- ❖ Services for children when their families can't care for them.
- ❖ Mental health services for all children, even the youngest.
- ❖ Services for children with special health care or behavioral needs.
- ❖ Adequate civil legal services to help families navigate public benefits and stabilize their living situations.
- ❖ Safe and affordable housing.

