

President's Corner



April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Family values need to be more than just talk. April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. It's a great time to put our family values into action and ensure that lawmakers' decisions—in Albany, Washington, and beyond—have a real, lasting and positive impact for children.

Statistics show unmet mental health needs, alcohol or drug abuse, financial distress and other factors contribute to abuse and neglect. Often the connections are very strong. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia looked at hospital emergency department data from all over the country. They found that, for every one-percent increase in 90-day mortgage delinquencies, hospital child abuse admissions increased by three percent.

If abuse and neglect are connected to financial and other strains on families, preventing abuse and neglect starts with investments in policies that ease the strain. In Washington, Congress passed two important supports this month: the bipartisan Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP, called Child Health Plus in NY) was extended for two years, as was the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program (MIECHV, which funds Healthy Families NY and Nurse-Family Partnership in NY).

As New York's families continue to struggle in a slowly recovering economy, CHIP is a lifeline. With affordable, dependable health care for their children, parents don't have to worry that a playground accident will drive the family into bankruptcy.

Evidence-based maternal and infant home visiting puts trained professionals where they can do the most good—in the homes of parents facing real challenges. Evidence shows that the coaching and support funded by MIECHV delivers more prepared parents, more resilient families, and healthier children.

New York lawmakers can make a difference, too. New York can continue to expand proven programs like Nurse-Family Partnership and Healthy Families NY, which provide services to young, vulnerable families. Right now, with limited funding, only a handful of pregnant and parenting families have the chance to participate. New York can restore its past investment in child welfare preventive, protective and post-adoption services, to reach a State funding share of 65%, as is written in statute. While the State budget has passed with little investment in programs that support children and families, lawmakers and advocates can lay the groundwork to ensure that child welfare services become State priorities. Together, providers, policymakers, and advocates can work to shape a vision for child abuse prevention that builds upon the strengths of our state: our communities, families, and programs that are already working to ensure the best results for children.

Prevention should be our first priority. But our state can also make better decisions when abuse or neglect happens. We need to make it easier for grandparents and other trusted adults to step in as caregivers to mitigate the trauma when it's necessary to remove kids from their homes. Hiring additional social workers can improve individualized attention to each child's safety and development. And changes like making health insurance available to young people "aging out" of foster care gives them a better chance to build a successful adult life.

Let's make sure NY's commitment continues beyond April. You don't have to be a policy expert or political insider to make a difference. Just pick up the phone and call your representatives in Albany. Ask them to tell you what they are doing to prevent abuse and neglect. Tell them that health coverage and maternal and infant home visiting make a real difference, and ask them what they are doing to strengthen investments in New York's children. Together, we can send a strong message that, here in New York, family values are more than just talk.