

Policy Priorities 2017-18

Strengthen New York Children, Families, and Communities

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy's 2017-2018 policy priorities aim to support and strengthen the health, well-being and economic security of New York families, children and communities, particularly those who are disenfranchised. In addition to state-level policies, we will be attentive to proposed federal policy and funding changes that could significantly impact the health and well-being of New York State's children and families.

Strengthen and Invest in Public Health and Health Coverage, Access and Care

Promises to restructure Medicaid and dismantle the health care reform law threaten health coverage and access for millions of low-income New Yorkers. At the state level, New York is moving forward with transforming how medical services are delivered and paid for, particularly with value-based payment. It is essential that we maintain coverage and access to health care and that children's interests are front and center. New York's system reform provides opportunity to realize the value of the social determinants of health, the importance of early childhood development and prevention, and the impacts of trauma.

Include consumers and community members in payment and delivery system reform. As the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program and Value-Based Payment (VBP) take shape, the State must protect Medicaid beneficiaries and the community-based services on which they rely by establishing mechanisms for consumer feedback, especially from consumers with the most significant barriers to engagement and access.

Ensure that children's health and development are addressed as New York undertakes payment and delivery system reform. In 2016, the State took an important step toward ensuring that payment and delivery system transformation efforts pay special attention to the needs and developmental trajectory of children when it convened the Value-Based Payment for Children Subcommittee and Clinical Advisory Group, co-chaired by Schuyler Center's President and CEO, Kate Breslin. The State must ensure that value-based payment for children is implemented thoughtfully and adequately funded.

Strengthen the children's behavioral health care infrastructure and workforce. The State is undertaking a significant, multi-agency initiative to improve the Medicaid children's behavioral health care benefit package. The success of these efforts depends on a small group of providers, many of which are under-resourced and financially distressed. It is urgent that the State invest in developing the children's behavioral health infrastructure and workforce to improve the system's capacity to serve children and families.

Invest in policies that prevent and treat dental disease, including community water fluoridation. Community water fluoridation is the single most cost-effective way to prevent dental disease but, outside of New York City, less than half of the state has access to fluoridated water. Communities need resources to continue or expand this public health practice. New York should reappropriate all remaining funds from the \$5 million committed to support community water fluoridation in the 2016-2017 budget to enable as many communities as possible to initiate community water fluoridation or strengthen existing fluoridation infrastructure.

Strengthen Families and Promote Family Economic Security

Poverty and deprivation have numerous negative impacts on children's health and development, with the impacts being most severe on very young children.¹ Modest investments in home visiting, working family tax credits and quality child care and pre-kindergarten can yield tremendous immediate and long-term benefits to children—and significant savings to the State in the form of reduced welfare dependency, criminal justice involvement, and health care costs.

Expand and integrate maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting. Home visiting is a two-generation intervention that strengthens families with young children by meeting with families in their homes and connecting them with health, psychological, parenting and other services, depending on each family's unique needs. It has been shown to be one of the most potent and cost-effective strategies targeting child poverty and ameliorating its devastating impacts. Home visiting has been shown to improve birth outcomes for newborns; increase high school graduation rates for children; increase workforce participation and lower rates of welfare dependency of parents; and reduce instances of child maltreatment in families. Notwithstanding its myriad proven benefits, there are funded slots to serve less than 5% of New York's young children living in poverty. The State must expand access, improve coordination and measurement across programs, and increase funding for home visiting to **\$37.2 million**, which includes:

- \$27.8 million to Healthy Families NY;
- \$6 million for Nurse-Family Partnership;
- \$1.4 million to Parents as Teachers; and
- \$2 million for Parent-Child Home.

Strengthen tax policies that make work pay for low- and moderate-income families. Modest income transfers to low-income families—particularly families with young children—can yield tremendous benefits for children and their families, including improved physical, emotional and behavioral health, higher educational attainment and increased future earnings.^{2,3} The State should increase the State's earned income tax credit (EITC) for families from the current 30% of the federal rate to 40%, and its child tax credit (CTC) from the current 33% of the federal rate, to 40%. The State should also expand its CTC to provide credits for children under age four, a group that is most severely impacted by poverty and yet is currently not eligible to receive the State's CTC.

Expand access to affordable, quality child care and pre-kindergarten. Over 80% of four-year-olds outside of New York City do not have access to Pre-K and more than 80% of New York families with young children and income below 200% of the poverty level cannot access child care subsidies. This makes it difficult or impossible for parents to secure full-time, stable employment and attain economic security. High-quality child care and Pre-K have been shown to substantially improve children's educational outcomes

and future success. To expand access to child care and Pre-K to more families that need it, the State should:

- make new investments in child care, including **\$56 million** to support immediate costs associated with new federal regulations and a substantial (**\$100 million**) increase in subsidies for eligible low-income families;
- add at least **\$150 million** to the current \$803 million invested in Pre-K to expand access to quality Pre-K outside of New York City, with priority to high needs districts and neighborhoods;
- take steps to protect existing Pre-K services and move the state toward a coherent and sustainable Pre-K financing strategy, starting with the conversion of Priority Pre-K to an aid formula, distributed by annual allocation like other education funding; and
- include adequate investment in K-12 school aid, to ensure Pre-K is followed by a continuum of quality educational services that prepare children for college and career.

Strengthen Families to Prevent Maltreatment, Enhance Kin Caregiver Programs, and Support Youth Transitioning Out of Care

New York's child welfare financing law is up for renewal in 2017, providing an opportunity for the State to build upon the many strengths of its system. To that end, we recommend continuing the State's strong commitment to preventive services and these targeted system improvements.

Preserve open-ended preventive funding, restore State share to 65%, and track results. The State should renew its investment in preventive services that keep children safe and families strong by preserving open-ended preventive funding and restoring the State reimbursement to 65%, as is written in statute (NY SSL sec. 153-k). The restored 3% should be directed to fund primary preventive services—services that localities can offer before there have been allegations of maltreatment. It is essential that this funding remain open-ended so that counties may invest as needed in services that help children avoid foster care. Further, the State should encourage and support counties' investment in evidence-based family strengthening services that keep children safely with their families, and track program results.

Invest in kin care services and enhance the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP).

Placing children with relatives when their parents are unable to care for them helps to maintain connections to family and culture. New York should support kinship families and cultivate permanent placements for children with family members through the Kinship Navigator, kinship services, and KinGAP.

- Maintain State funding for kinship services at **\$2.3 million** to ensure that families have access to services.
- Expand a permission to contact procedure so that the Kinship Navigator can better connect kinship families to services. Support this implementation by increasing funding for the Navigator by \$89,500 to fund a full-time in-take professional and support training of social services staff, bringing total funding for the Kinship Navigator to **\$410,000**.
- Improve services and outcomes for children who are being cared for by kin when their parents cannot care for them due to immigration detention or deportation. This issue will require significant attention, should the incoming Presidential administration make good on promises to dramatically increase deportations of immigrants.

So that more families can take advantage of KinGAP the State should:

- remove it from the Foster Care Block Grant and fund it like the adoption subsidy;
- allow payments to continue until age 21 regardless of age of finalization; and
- use the same definition of kin as is used for kinship foster care, so that half siblings are considered in sibling groups and “fictive kin,” such as godparents, are eligible.

Strengthen the child welfare housing subsidy program. As many as one-third of the approximately 1,300 New York youth who age out of foster care each year experience homelessness, and many more experience unstable housing arrangements.^{4,5} To prevent homelessness and housing instability among former foster youth, the State should increase the child welfare housing subsidy allowance to \$600 (from \$300); increase the upper age limit for eligibility from 21 to 24 so that youth who age out of foster care at 21 can avail themselves of the subsidy for up to 3 years; and allow youth receiving the housing subsidy to live with unrelated roommates to save on expenses.

Support foster youth attending college. Only 2 to 7% of foster youth complete a two- or four-year degree leaving them less likely to secure and retain employment in adulthood. The State must invest in our youth in foster care by renewing its investment in the Foster College Success Initiative and increasing funding to **\$4.5 million** to support youth pursuing higher education who either are or had been in foster care.

A strong and supported child welfare workforce. The child welfare workforce—from preventive services to Child Protective Services to foster care and beyond—is the backbone of a strong and supportive system. However, across New York State, caseloads for these workers vary greatly— from CPS caseloads of about 12 in New York City⁶ to as high as 40 in Erie County⁷— well above the CPS caseload of 12 recommended by researchers.⁸ The State should provide adequate funding and support to improve the capacity of the workforce to meet the needs of children and families.

Raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction. New York is one of only two states to automatically try all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults in the justice system. It is time for New York to raise the age of criminal responsibility. The State should support recommendations from the Governor’s Commission on Public Safety and Juvenile Justice to enact comprehensive legislation to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction and better support the juvenile justice system so that children are treated as children.

Endnotes

- 1 Cauthen, Nancy. (2002). Policies That Improve Family Income Matter for Children. National Center for Children in Poverty. http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_480.pdf
- 2 Garfinkel, I., Harris, D., Waldfogel, J., & Wimer, C. (2016). Doing More For Our Children: Modeling a Universal Child Allowance or More Generous Child Tax Credit. The Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/report/doing-more-for-our-children/>
- 3 White, G.B. (2015). Income Makes a Big Difference for Kids. The Atlantic. <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/09/income-inequality-poverty-children/407512/>
- 4 Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center. (2014). Children Exiting Foster Care by Exit Reason. <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6277-children-exiting-foster-care-by-exit-reason?loc=34&loc=2#-detailed/2/34/false/36,868,867,133,38/2629,2630,2631,2632,2633,2634,2635,2636/13050,13051>
- 5 US Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2014, May). Housing for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care. http://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/youth_hsg_main_report.pdf
- 6 New York City Administration for Children’s Services. (2015, Nov.). Flash. http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/Flash_Nov_2015.pdf
- 7 Michel, Lou. (February 17, 2014). Erie County taking steps to reduce caseloads for child-protective workers. The Buffalo News. <http://www.buffalonews.com/city-region/erie-county/erie-county-taking-steps-to-reduce-caseloads-for-child-protective-workers-20140217>
- 8 New York State Office of Children & Family Services. (2006). New York State Child Welfare Workload Study: Final Report, submitted by Walter R. MacDonald & Associates. <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/reports/WorkloadStudy.pdf>