

The Children's Agenda

The Children's Agenda 2021 State Advocacy Priority Agenda

In 2021, we must protect children from the deeply negative and lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope that this will be a year of rebuilding lost supports and reducing inequities that were exacerbated by the health, economic and racial justice crises of 2020. To that end, in each of our priority issue areas we recommend that the Governor and Legislators:

- Restore any reductions made in 2020 to programs serving vulnerable children and maintain at least level funding for those services in SFY22;
- Reject across-the-board cuts that would perpetuate existing inequities; and
- Address budget shortfalls through revenue strategies that are: targeted to those who can best afford to contribute more, are sufficient to meet the needs of children and families, and prioritized for expenditures that address New Yorkers who have been harmed the most during the pandemic and are most in need of assistance.

CHILD CARE

We call upon Governor Cuomo and the Legislature to include the following investments in New York's SFY22 budget. They must provide New York's child care sector with the funds necessary to stabilize and begin to rebuild the sector. They should also lay the foundation for a universal system that serves all New York families that need care, one animated by the emerging recognition that child care is a public good, and is an integral part of a birth-to-12 education system. New York State must make the following investments in child care this year:

1. Require subsidy payments to providers for at least 12 absences/quarter per child, plus federal holidays, building toward a system in which providers have parity and are not penalized for serving their subsidy-assisted families, and are paid based on enrollment rather than a child's daily attendance;
2. Make the child care subsidy system more equitable across all counties and prioritize families with the greatest need by investing \$370 million to eliminate unfair eligibility variations.
3. Eliminate expulsions and out-of-school suspensions in child care and pre-K, which disproportionately impact children of color;
4. Create a \$100 million fund to bring workforce compensation up to a fair wage and improve child care quality. Prioritize programs that serve low-income families and care for infants and toddlers.

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

In 2021-22, the demands on the Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education systems will be high as families seek to restore developmental growth lost during the pandemic. New York State must respond fully, with enhanced services for children who received little or no services during the pandemic due to agency and school closures, lack of appropriate devices or internet access, and other barriers. This response should be in addition to, not in place of, action to reverse the existing provider shortage that has left children falling behind as they wait for mandated services and instruction.

1. Enact a Covered Lives assessment to bring badly needed additional revenue into the Early Intervention program and to ensure that commercial insurers pay their fair share of Early Intervention services. The assessment should be at least \$40 million in SFY22.
2. As a step towards an increase of 10% in both Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education reimbursement rates, conduct a comprehensive assessment of the methodology used to determine payment for all early intervention evaluations, services and service coordination, and develop a new tuition rate-setting methodology for Preschool Special Education so that rates better reflect the costs of delivering services.

3. Guarantee parity in annual funding increases between public schools and preschool special education programs. We support the Board of Regents' proposal to change state law to require the State to provide at least the same percentage increase in funding to preschool special education programs as it gives to public schools each year.

P-12 EDUCATION

We call upon Governor Cuomo and the Legislature to include the following investments in New York's SFY22 budget:

1. Restore 2020 aid withholding and do not cut P-12 education funding in New York in SFY22. After a year of unstable and inequitable education, New York students will need more support than ever before. School budgets will be stretched with added costs of PPE, cleaning supplies and possibly additional staff to deliver compensatory educational services. This is no time to shortcut education aid.
2. Fully fund Foundation Aid. The formula that was created in 2007 to provide a predictable, stable and transparent method of achieving greater funding equity for those school districts that need it the most has not been fully funded or used since 2009. Currently, the state is \$3.8 billion behind its legal and constitutional obligation to provide Foundation Aid.

CHILD POVERTY

We call upon Governor Cuomo and the Legislature to enact the Child Poverty Reduction Bill (S.9012/A.11063). With child poverty skyrocketing due to the impacts of the pandemic, it is more important than ever for government to put reducing child poverty at the center of its work. New York cannot build back better if it leaves New York children behind.

The legislation proposes a pledge to reduce child poverty in half in New York state by 2030 and:

1. Creates a Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council that would hold public hearings and consider changes in state policy and funding to achieve the 50% reduction goal, such as tax credits for families living in poverty and expanded access to child care, housing and employment assistance; and
2. Requires the state Budget Director to evaluate the effects that adjustments to the state budget will have on reducing child poverty in New York State.