

Analysis of the Proposed 2022 Monroe County Budget

Executive Summary

December 9, 2021

The Children's Agenda

*Authored by: Brigit Hurley, Senior Director
of Advocacy & Programs*



TheChildren'sAgenda

Smart Choices. Bold Voices.

www.thechildrensagenda.org

For more information contact
bhurley@thechildrensagenda.org

Executive Summary

Monroe County will emerge from this acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic as a different community. If we make the right choices, **we will be stronger**. With an unprecedented infusion of state and federal dollars and greater awareness of disparities that have hurt many of our children, we can bring Monroe County back by ensuring all children in our community thrive. We can invest in prevention that pays off over the long run. We can adopt practices and policies that will build a brighter future for children, especially those most affected by poverty, racism, health inequities, and trauma. We can craft a comprehensive plan that removes barriers to services and eliminates silos. The Children's Agenda stands ready to work with the County to make smart, bold choices for children.

The Children's Agenda offers this review of the proposed 2022 County budget and its impact on children and youth at a time of uncertainty. We join with community leaders and residents in calling for an **inclusive and equitable recovery** that does not simply fill gaps created by the pandemic, or even the decades of child poverty and racism in Monroe County. Instead, our recovery efforts must shift resources to create a new roadmap for the future. We look forward to 2022 with hope. Crises create opportunities, and we see many opportunities for Monroe County's children in the year ahead and beyond.

We urge the County to use the following [TCA recommendations](#) and [Urban Institute principles](#) to guide decision-making:

- Target those who faced the greatest inequities before the COVID-19 pandemic and those who face the greatest negative effects during the pandemic.
- Support the most vulnerable children and families still recovering from this past two years of health, education and economic disruption.
- Enhance equity by building on the evidence of what works and plan to measure long-term outcomes, creating foundations for enduring, racially equitable systems.
- Be informed by input from communities historically excluded from decision-making.
- Build resiliency, keeping in mind that our community's [financial health depends on the financial security](#) of its residents.
- Invest new revenue to supplement rather than supplant existing revenue, focusing on prevention.

An inclusive recovery occurs when a [community] overcomes economic distress in a way that enables all residents—especially historically excluded populations—to benefit from and contribute to economic prosperity. Inclusive recovery doesn't just happen—it requires deliberate policy actions that promote racial and economic inclusion across a range of issues. (Urban Institute, 4/14/21)

Priority Recommendations for 2022

» Child Care

Adopt changes in policy and practice to the child care subsidy program that stabilize the child care system in Monroe County and make affordable care easier to access. The Children’s Agenda recommends five key improvements:

- 1) To provide stable income for child care providers and incentivize providers’ acceptance of child care subsidies, the County should establish a **new absence reimbursement policy** with the following components:
 - Reimburse providers for up to **15 absences per child per month** and up to **20 in a three-month period**.
 - Make **all types** of routine absences (illness, vacation, etc.) reimbursable and include Child Care Centers, Family Child Care, Group Family Child Care, and School-Age Child Care programs.
 - Require that a provider be **open** and the child be **scheduled** to attend as a condition of payment, and establish reasonable provider **documentation** requirements.
- 2) To **streamline** child care funding, the County should **pilot a contractual model** that guarantees funding “upfront” for child care services delivered to a specified number of children who qualify for child care assistance, possibly targeting a hard-to-serve population such children with disabilities or infants and toddlers.
- 3) To ensure child care subsidies are **fully utilized**, create an **awareness campaign** to publicize the availability of child care assistance. Because the County had limited funds for many years, families might be reluctant to even apply. Potential opportunities are advertising on buses and billboards and in County communications.
- 4) Join with The Children’s Agenda, the Kids Can’t Wait campaign and others to **advocate** that New York:
 - Prohibit **expulsions and suspensions** of Birth – 5 year-olds from all early care and education settings.
 - Provide child care providers who care for **children with disabilities** with higher enhanced reimbursement rates and more professional development, early childhood mental health consultations, and other related supports.
- 5) Explore opportunities to help stabilize providers’ revenue by increasing reimbursements when a child needs **part-time care**. Currently if a parent’s work and transportation time – the latter is defined as 60 minutes per day – are under 30 hours per week, providers are paid a part-time rate. This results in lost revenue because it impossible to find another family whose care needs are the exact opposite of another’s. One recommendation is to offer full-time reimbursement for all slots over 20 or 25 hours per week, accommodating a more realistic travel time for parents who use bus transportation. This would also limit the number of money-losing part-time slots that wreak havoc on child care program budgets.

» **Community Service Integration**

Expand efforts to integrate health and human services and to design community-based service delivery. The Children’s Agenda recommends two approaches:

- 1) We fully support the County’s work with the Systems Integration Project to design more equitable and accessible avenues for residents to get help **when and where** they need it and encourage that work to remain a priority.
- 2) Additionally, to capitalize on the benefits of embedding services in community settings and adhere to inclusive recovery principles, we recommend giving **priority consideration** to Black- and Latino-led nonprofit community groups and neighborhood organizations.

» **Youth Voice in Community Planning**

Prioritize youth participation from all regions of the county in the comprehensive plan development. The Children’s Agenda recommends two main strategies:

- 1) Because youth have unique insights into what services and County initiatives will be relevant and impactful for their well-being, we strongly urge the County to incorporate a **robust youth engagement** process as the comprehensive plan is developed. The residents who will be most impacted in the long run by the plan must have a voice. This should be a major function of the newly revamped Youth Bureau in 2022.
- 2) To build on effective practices, the County should look to **proven examples** to develop the youth component of the comprehensive planning process. These may include the [Buffalo-Niagara Partnership for the Public Good](#), Washington State’s [Youth in Planning](#), and resources offered by the [Institute for Local Governance](#).

» **Accountability**

To bring more transparency to the use of COVID-relief funds, The Children’s Agenda recommends that two steps be taken:

- 1) To build greater community awareness of, trust in and support for County initiatives, provide **frequent updates** regarding expenditure of federal COVID-relief funds via an online “Bring Monroe Back Recovery Plan” table and in social and news media. Include information on the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).
- 2) To demonstrate the **impact** of those expenditures, we recommend that spending updates include estimates of the number of people served or impacted including an explanation of how the spending benefits vulnerable and historically marginalized communities.

Priority Commendations

The Children’s Agenda applauds the proposed County investments targeted at economic and social recovery from the pandemic. We especially urge the legislature to **keep** the following investments in the adopted budget:

- \$1.7 million for development of the Community Service Integration Initiative.
- Expanded child care resources for low income families and for child care programs who are struggling to survive in a sector where 128 facilities have closed resulting in a loss of 4,213 slots since April 2020.
- Additional Youth Bureau engagement specialists to connect with and serve disengaged youth and those transitioning out of detention and foster care.
- Added staff for security and youth programming at the Children’s Center which detains youth involved in the criminal justice system.
- Increasing Preschool Special Education Related Services rates by 5% for all providers, aiding in the recruitment of needed new providers and encouraging retention of current providers.
- Additional appropriations with the intention of reaching children in need of developmental services who were unserved during the pandemic.
- Additional 20 case aides for Child Protective Services, to free up caseworkers’ time to work with families.

We also commend the County for increasing the **minimum wage** to \$15. There is [ample evidence](#) that links increased family income with improved child outcomes. The differing experiences of Monroe County families during the pandemic demonstrated what research had already concluded – income inequality unfairly disadvantages children. Investments in wage increases have a positive impact on our children’s and communities’ future.