



2024 Policy Priorities for Child Poverty Reduction

As a diverse group of organizations working to improve both immediate and long-term outcomes for children and families experiencing economic hardship, we urge the State to act to **reduce child poverty and racial inequity, starting by ensuring robust tax credits and cash assistance, continuous Medicaid coverage, and housing and nutritional supports for all families, no matter where they were born.** All children, and particularly children residing across the great state of New York, should grow up free from the stress and strains of poverty.

We know that investments in children and families are vehicles that help our children, economy, and society thrive. Our Campaign takes the firm position that the governor and legislature should exhaust all avenues, including all progressive revenue-raising options, to ensure that New York fully invests in services essential to the well-being of New York children and families, especially those from low-income, Black, brown, immigrant and other historically marginalized communities.

Goal 1: Strengthen New York's tax credits. Increased income for families in or near poverty has been shown to be an effective poverty-fighting tool. The State should take decisive action to improve its refundable tax credits to ensure that they can most effectively support New York families, including by:

- **Strengthening the State child tax credit** so it reaches the poorest New Yorkers, currently excluded from the full credit. New York made significant strides in the 2023-24 Budget by correcting the exclusion of children under age four but, as expert testimony provided to the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council makes clear, child tax credits lose their poverty-fighting power when the full benefits are denied to the lowest income households. We recommend removing the current income phase-in from the Empire State Child Credit (ESCC) to maximize its poverty-fighting potential and reduce existing racial disparities among children benefiting from the program. We also recommend increasing the credit amount to have a meaningful impact on a family's budget.
- **Strengthening the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** so that all working New Yorkers who are eligible may file, including those filing with an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN), as is permitted with the ESCC, and increasing the value of the credit.

Goal 2: Stabilize housing and reduce costs for thousands of families, by:

- **Funding the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP)**, which would create a state-funded voucher that would operate much like the federal Section 8 program. A commitment of \$250 million toward HAVP would have a transformative impact, aiding nearly 15,000¹ families or individuals in exiting or preventing homelessness.

- **Increasing the Public Assistance housing** allowance to a level that stabilizes housing for more families. Currently at a statewide average of \$347 for a household of four², the PA housing allowance was last adjusted twenty years ago – in 2003³.

Goal 3: Remove administrative barriers that prevent families from accessing, or cause families to lose access to, critical programs, including:

- **Ensure all eligible children remain continuously enrolled from birth to age 6 in Medicaid and Child Health Plus (CHP) health coverage** – programs which provide no-cost or low-cost health coverage for eligible children. As the State returns to pre-COVID Medicaid rules, children are urgently at risk of being disenrolled and losing coverage. New York can – and should – commit to multi-year continuous coverage as have several other states, including Washington, Oregon, California, Ohio, Minnesota, and Colorado. The time to do this is now, as the current administration in Washington, DC has demonstrated an openness to the policy.
- **Establish and fund a permanent, statewide Healthy School Meals for All program** that provides school breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students in schools participating in the National School Lunch Program. Healthy School Meals for All is a proven strategy that reduces food insecurity and helps lift families out of poverty. In the FY2024 state budget, lawmakers took a critical step in this direction, investing in the expansion of an existing federal provision – the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) – that allows high-poverty schools to provide free meals at no cost to all students. However, CEP does not reach all children. CEP eligibility is tied to participation in means-tested programs such as SNAP and Medicaid, which have well-established barriers for many families, including immigrant families. Schools in rural and suburban communities and areas with stark economic inequalities also struggle to qualify for CEP. Providing universal free school meals is the best way to ensure equitable access without stigma for *all* students.

The NY Can End Child Poverty group strongly supports the following efforts:

- The Empire State Campaign for Child Care’s priorities, including universal child care.
- SNAP for all, regardless of immigration status.
- Paid Medical Leave, led by A Better Balance

<https://newyorkcan.org/>

¹ https://furmancenter.org/files/publications/2_A_State-Level_Rent_Voucher_Program_Final.pdf

² <https://otda.ny.gov/news/meetings/attachments/2023-03-07-CPRAC-Shelter-Allowance.pdf>

³ <https://otda.ny.gov/news/meetings/cprac/2023-08-10/attachments/2023-08-10-OTDA-Presentation.pdf>