Legislators, Families, Union Members, Providers and Advocates Rally at NYC City Hall to Oppose Proposed State Budget Cuts that Target Child Safety and Family Well-being in NYC

Governor’s Budget Targets NYC with Cuts to Child Protective Services, Preventive Services and Juvenilue Justice Close to Home Program Funding

PHOTOS: Available HERE (Photo Credit: New York State Child Welfare Coalition)

Dozens of legislators, parents, union members, providers and advocates rallied at City Hall today to oppose state budget proposals to cut child welfare and juvenile justice services in New York City. They are urging New York State not to balance the State’s budget by cutting services for the most vulnerable children, youth and families from New York City.

Despite the increasing need to ensure children, youth and families have access to critical preventive services in their communities amidst an opioid and homelessness crisis, and the imminent implementation of Raise the Age, the Executive Budget proposes to cut funding for the very services that ensure strong supports are in place and positive outcomes are achieved for children, youth and families.

The State and City have always had a shared commitment to providing care, support and services to children at risk of abuse or neglect and youth in the juvenile justice system. The Budget proposes maintain this commitment to all counties except the children and families in the 5 boroughs of New York City. This is dangerous for New York City and dangerous precedent for the State.

The Executive Budget proposes to:

- Cap and cut New York City’s child welfare services funding stream, which includes child protective services, preventive services and independent living services. New York’s child welfare financing structure, in place since 2002, was intended to incentivize good outcomes by capping foster care reimbursement while reimbursing counties 62% of the costs for the services that keep children and youth safe and out of foster care. New York City has leveraged this funding stream to lower child protective caseloads, decrease juvenile justice detention and placement, dramatically reduce the use of foster care, and become a national model for its continuum of high quality, effective preventive services.

- Eliminate all $41.4 of State support for the Close to Home juvenile justice placement program in New York City despite the fact that the system is due to triple with the implementation of Raise the Age and provides New York City with no other resources to support Raise the Age.
“I strongly oppose the proposed cuts to child welfare and juvenile justice. These services prevent child abuse, mistreatment, and neglect. It is crucial that they receive adequate funding to properly serve and protect the children of New York,” said Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi, A.D 28.

“All New York child welfare professionals are proud of the fact that the number of children in foster care is at a historic low level. The public and private sectors working together have the means to work with families whose children are at high risk of foster care placement but who can, with preventive services, be kept safely at home with their families. Now the Executive budget threatens that by proposing to cap the state share of these services and requiring that in the future these vital preventive services will compete with child protection for funding. We have seen this movie before in our state, and the result will be more children in foster care,” said Jim Purcell, Chief Executive Officer, Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies.

“I want my kids to grow up to be proud of their parents and the life that we have made for them. With the support I’ve gotten, I’ve definitely become a stronger, more dedicated mom. I’m more understanding and gentle with my kids. I take out more time to listen to them and understand what they feel,” said Mariya Kolesnichenko, a parent who has participated in preventive services.

“Citizens’ Committee for Children appreciates the partnership we had with the State, which led to the successful passage of Raise the Age legislation. The success of Raise the Age is contingent upon its implementation and all counties, including New York City, need resources to do this. We are very concerned that the proposed budget not only leaves New York City without new raise the age funding, but also eliminates all state support for the close to home juvenile placement system. For Raise the Age to be a success, it must succeed in New York City- so we urge the state to keep its commitment to share in the costs for all counties,” said Jennifer March, Executive Director, Citizens’ Committee for Children.

“The most sacred goal of government is to keep children safe and one of the best ways to do that is to strengthen and support families and communities. The state’s proposed cap and cut to funding child protective and preventive services in New York City alters the shared commitment and incentivized payment structure in a way that jeopardizes the progress and successes made in child welfare in New York City,” said Stephanie Gendell, Associate Executive Director of Policy and Advocacy, Citizens’ Committee for Children.

“The proposed cuts to child welfare are sweeping – from child protective and preventative services, to juvenile justice programs – and threaten to undo critical progress New York State has made in recent years,” said Sr. Paulette LoMonaco, Executive Director of Good Shepherd Services. “Facing ever-rising costs, New York City’s community based organizations are already struggling to survive while serving our state’s most vulnerable children and families. The services on the state’s chopping block are often the only lifelines keeping families together and giving young people who have made a mistake a second chance. It is unconscionable for the State to target New York City’s families when they need our help more than ever before.”

“The Governor’s shortsighted budget eliminates funding for critical preventive child welfare and juvenile justice programming, threatening NYC’s low-income children and families of color,” said Dawne A. Mitchell, Attorney-in-Charge of the Juvenile Rights Practice at The Legal Aid Society. “The proposed cap on preventive services funding for New York City threatens the City’s ability to keep children out of foster care and safely with their families. De-funding the innovative Close to Home program jeopardizes the future of youth in our communities. We implore the Governor to amend the budget to present a plan that truly works for New York’s youth and their families.”
NYC has made a critical shift to strengthening families without putting children through the trauma of being removed from home and placed in foster care. State investments in preventive services have been crucial to ensuring that our state’s most fragile families can thrive. At Rise, we see the pain of family separation and the difficulties families face repairing their relationships and rebuilding their daily lives when children come home. Children blame themselves, and they act out, fearful that their families will fail again. Services to prevent placement and to support families after foster care are so important to keep children not only safe but thriving," said Nora McCarthy, Director, Rise.

“We applaud the historic progress New York has made by raising the age of criminal responsibility, but for this change to be fully realized, funding must be secured for all New York counties – including New York City where many of these children live. It is also critical that Close to Home be reauthorized and fully funded so that New York City can serve its youth, including those entering the juvenile system as a result of the raise the age legislation. We believe that funding the youth justice system is fundamental, however we also firmly believe in prevention programs that divert young people from the system and so we urge that the proposed cap on preventative funding be rescinded,” said Naomi Post, Executive Director, Children’s Defense Fund-NY.

“Lawyers For Children has advocated on behalf of New York City children and youth in foster care since 1984, and we are extremely concerned that the proposed cuts and changes to the child welfare funding formula will roll back over 20 years of progress. New York City’s robust system of preventive services has helped to reduce the foster care population by more than 75%, while keeping children safely in their homes, enabling reunification with their families, and breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect. The proposed cap on the State’s share of New York City’s preventive service spending will unfairly treat New York City children differently from similarly situated children throughout the state, which is unacceptable. We urge the Governor and the Legislature to continue to make critical investments proven to keep children safe, no matter their New York State zip code,” said Karen J. Freedman, Executive Director, Lawyers For Children.

“The Close to Home initiative is working throughout New York City and has led to a dramatic reduction in re-arrests of youth. Cutting the Close to Home budget by 40% is a mistake that potentially will result in less support of young people and an ultimate decrease in community safety," said Alan Mucatel, Executive Director, Leake & Watts.

“These close-to-home, preventive and protective cuts will eviscerate the successful safety-net of evidence based and evidence informed interventions that keep children safe. A safety-net and interventions that not only reduced the tax-payer cost by keeping children safe with their families, but also deeply impacted the pervasive social-justice antecedents that disproportionately hurt the poor and children of color,” said Jeremy Kohomban, Executive Director and CEO, The Children’s Village.

“The strong partnership between the City and State has created unprecedented progress to improve the lives of countless children, young people and families. It is not in anyone’s interest to defund Close to Home, cap Preventive funding and stop Raise the Age before we get started. The Governor deserves credit for advancing these critical initiatives. The right thing to do is to continue committing State resources to our most vulnerable,” said Ronald Richter, Chief Executive Officer, JCCA.

“The cap on preventive services, the complete annihilation of the close to home program funding, and the total disregard for the initial phase of raise the age are all quite counter-intuitive and counter-productive. In fact, you could make the argument that these initiatives represent the three most important and consequential policy
shifts in the last 20 years in child welfare and juvenile justice,” said Bill Baccaglini, President and CEO, The New York Founding.

“We know the benefits of keeping adolescents Close to Home while they learn or recover the skills necessary for success: increased family engagement, increased community engagement, and higher educational achievement. The pending enactment of Raise the Age only serves to expand these benefits to increase the likelihood of a youth’s success upon release. The 16- and 17-year olds entering our juvenile justice system deserve the full benefit of what we know: not only that their successful rehabilitation requires we recognize their adolescence, but also that their families and communities serve as a necessary foundation for future success. Cutting the funding for the Close to Home initiative will undercut the rehabilitation our youth while undermining the Raise the Age law before it is even implemented. We must staunchly defend Close to Home as a necessary component of our juvenile justice system and a required foundation to Raise the Age,” said Elizabeth McCarthy, CEO, Sheltering Arms.

“NYS’s forward thinking investment in preventives services since the 1980’s has resulted in substantial reductions in foster care, improved outcomes for youth, and lower cost to taxpayers. The proposed changes to NYC preventive services funding is a serious threat and a step backward. We have to support effective and efficient services to at risk families and kids-the cap must be eliminated. Our kids deserve better,” said William T. Gettman, Jr., CEO, Northern Rivers Family of Services.

“Capping services designed to keep children safe and prevent child abuse and neglect, is not only dangerous and short-sighted, but fundamentally inconsistent with the State’s current initiatives. At a time when the State is investing in health initiatives that aim to strengthen families with young children, we should not leave behind children and families in, or at risk of entering, the child welfare system. We should be working across sectors to shore up systems that strengthen children and give them the building blocks for a bright future. Instead, this budget proposal would significantly restrict supports for New York’s struggling families,” said Kate Breslin, President & CEO, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy.

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