

May 26, 2022

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
New York State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

As faith-based organizations from across New York, we write to you to uplift the moral and human need for you to empanel the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council with utmost urgency and to prioritize appointing to the council impacted youth and clergy leaders who serve in impacted communities. As you are aware, the creation of the Advisory Council is stipulated in the Child Poverty Reduction Act [S. 2755C (Ramos) / A. 1160C (Bronson)], which you signed into law last December. The Advisory Council is tasked with recommending legislative and budgetary actions to reduce child poverty in New York by half within eleven years, with a focus on promoting racial equity and reducing racial disparities in child poverty. As the law requires members of the Advisory Council to be announced and appointed by April 15, 2022 and the body to convene on or before May 1, 2022 – dates that have both passed – we urge you to act swiftly in empaneling this critical Advisory Council.

As we know all too well, child poverty is an urgent and preventable crisis in our State. Children – particularly children of color and very young children – are the poorest Americans and the poorest New Yorkers. Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, one in every five New York children (nearly 800,000 children) lived in poverty, with Black and Latinx children more than twice as likely as white children to live in poverty in our State and New York carrying a higher child poverty rate than that of 34 other states.<sup>1</sup> New York's 15th Congressional District, located in the Bronx, has the highest child poverty rate of any of our nation's Congressional Districts. Syracuse carries the highest child poverty rate in the nation among cities with at least 100,000 people (48.4 percent), with Buffalo and Rochester also ranking within the top ten list of large U.S. cities with the highest child poverty rates. Poverty harms our children in numerous ways, with impoverished children suffering worse health outcomes and being more likely to be hungry, less likely to have health coverage or graduate from high school and more likely to be unemployed and experience poverty as adults. Furthermore, child poverty costs our State over \$60 billion every year in reduced earnings and increased costs associated with health, homelessness, child welfare and criminal justice.

Child poverty is not inevitable. It is – and always has been – a policy choice. Nor is it morally defensible to have children living in poverty in one of the wealthiest states in the world's richest country. The Children's Defense Fund's Founder and President Emerita Marian Wright Edelman describes child poverty as both "a moral disgrace and profound economic threat," arguing that "[t]here

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Detailed Estimates.  
To view CDF-NY's county data profiles, visit <https://cdfny.org/county-profiles/>.

is no excuse for allowing needless child suffering in our land of tremendous affluence.”<sup>2</sup> As organizations of faith, we urge you to take tangible steps to right this moral stain on our State’s character.

This year’s State Budget missed critical opportunities to invest in children, youth and families, through such actions as continuing New York’s exclusion of children under four from the Empire State Child Credit, unjustly excluding undocumented children from child care investments and failing to guarantee continuous health coverage the first three years of a child’s life. These and other missed opportunities illustrate the danger of decisions made in the absence of intent to reduce child poverty and underscore the vital need to assess the impacts that legislative and budgetary decisions can have on the wellbeing of our children, youth and families.

We thereby collectively implore you to center the needs of the youngest and most marginalized New Yorkers and to realign our State’s moral compass by acting swiftly to convene the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council without further delay. It is past time to prioritize ending child poverty in New York. The faith community is watching and awaiting the convening of this moral council, which must include the voices of impacted youth and clergy leaders who serve in impacted communities.

Sincerely,

**Children’s Defense Fund – New York**

*Kercena A. Dozier, Executive Director*



**Antioch Baptist Church**

*Rev. Dr. Shon Adkins, Pastor*



**Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church**

*Rev. Paul Thomas, Pastor*



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<sup>2</sup> Children’s Defense Fund, “Ending Child Poverty Now,” April 2019, <https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ending-Child-Poverty-2019.pdf>.

**Bethel Gospel Assembly, Inc.**

*Carlton T. Brown, Bishop*



**Catholic Charities Family & Community Services**

*Marcus Ebenhoe, Director of Advocacy*



**Church Women United in New York State**

*Mary Smith, Communications Director*



**Faith in New York**

*Crystal Walthall, Executive Director*



**Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA)**

*Raysa S. Rodriguez, Chief Program and Policy Officer*



**First Corinthian Baptist Church (FCBC)**

*Michael A. Walrond, Jr., Senior Pastor*



**First Presbyterian Church of Forest Hills**

*Rev. Jeffrey Courter, Interim Pastor*



**Garden of Gethsemane Ministries**

*Apostle Dr. Staci Ramos, Founder & Senior Pastor*



**Imani's Quest Ministries**

*Rev. Yolanda Brown, Pastor*



**Interfaith Public Health Network**

*Robert Pezolesi, Convener*



**Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester**

*Meredith Dragon, CEO*



**Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church of Buffalo, New York**

*Rev. Julian Armand Cook, Senior Pastor*



**Middle Collegiate Church**

*Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, Senior Minister for Public Theology and Transformation & Chief of Staff*



**New York Disaster Interfaith Services**

*Peter B. Gudaitis, M.Div., Executive Director & CEO*



**New York State Council of Churches**

*Rev. Peter Cook, Executive Director*



**Park Avenue Christian Church**

*Pastor Kaji Douša, Senior Pastor*



**Prophetic Whirlwind Ministries**

*Apostle Onleilove Chika Alston,  
Founder*



**Quarryville United Methodist Church**

*Eugene Knoth, Pastor*



**Queens Baptist Church**

*Rev. Brian C. Ellis-Gibbs, Pastor*



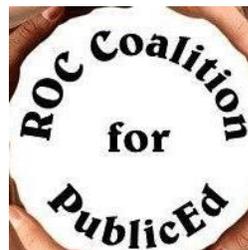
**RocACTS (Rochester Alliance of Communities Transforming Society)**

*Dr. Gayle Harrison, Board President*



**Rochester Coalition for Public Education**

*Dan Drmacich, Coordinator*



**Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York**

*Sr. Joan Agro, OP, Congregational Secretary*



**Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester**

*Sister Phyllis Tierney, Coordinator,  
Sisters of St. Joseph Office of Justice  
and Peace*



**St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church**

*Jim O'Hanlon, Pastor*



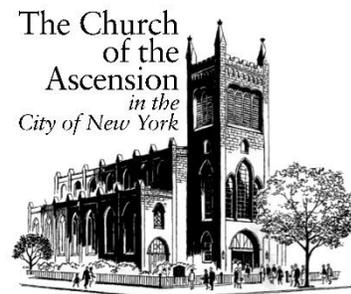
**The Black Church Center for Justice and Equality**

*Rev. Dr. Willie Francois III, President*



**The Church of the Ascension in the City of New York**

*Elizabeth G. Maxwell, Rector*



**The Double Love Experience Church**

*Rev. Andrew Wilkes, Co-Pastor*



**The Interfaith Center of New York**

*Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer, Executive Director*



**The Riverside Church in the City of New York**

*Rev. Michael Livingston, Interim Senior Minister*



**Westminster Presbyterian Church**

*Rev. Dr. Paul H. Randall*



**WESTMINSTER**  
— Presbyterian Church —