March 3, 2025

Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins, President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building, Room 907
Albany, New York 12247

Honorable Carl Heastie, Speaker of the Assembly
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building, Room 932
Albany, New York 12248

RE: The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund in the FY 2025-26 Budget

Dear Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Heastie,

We want to ensure that the Senate and the Assembly include the **Child and Family Wellbeing Fund** (A63 - Hevesi / Brisport - Senate bill number to come) as a budget priority this year. The Fund would direct state dollars to communities with the highest rates of child protective services (CPS) contact and disproportionate impact on families of color, to grow neighborhood assets through a local inquiry and participatory grantmaking process.

Black and Latinx parents are disparately impacted by CPS for challenges faced by families of all races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status. The majority of reports to the state child abuse hotline are made not for abuse, but for poverty-related conditions.

The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund is intended to fund community-led projects that strengthen families, reduce their vulnerability to the well-documented harms associated with CPS contact, and invest in supports that enhance family preservation, reunification, and healing. The Fund is a five-year pilot, serving 10 communities statewide, with a fiscal of $30 million.

Heeding Calls for Dedicated State Funding for Community-Driven Family Support

Across New York State, parents and young people impacted by the child welfare system and other activists have increasingly called for dedicated state funding for community-driven programming to:

- Invest in family wellbeing
- Improve neighborhood conditions
- Increase economic opportunity
- Eliminate poverty
- Ensure that families can get support without the threat of unnecessary family separation through the child welfare system

This Fund is the vision a group of statewide advocates with lived expertise in the child welfare system and expertise in research, policy, and advocacy who came together three years ago to develop a framework and proposal for community investment with state dollars that can address conditions that lead to high rates of child welfare involvement, particularly for Black and Latinx children, youth and families in New York.[1]

In developing the Fund's framework, the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund Working Group examined and drew upon projects within New York and across the U.S. that have combined community-led planning to strengthen neighborhood assets with local grantmaking to fund trusted grassroots groups.

Redefining Child Welfare: Promoting Child and Family Wellbeing

New York State's **"family policy guidelines**" prioritize government support for families that promote **"safe, nurturing environments which support the healthy growth of all family members."** However, the current framework of CPS intervention investigates and prosecutes families for "neglect"—often allegations related to parental inability to provide basic necessities.

Many families who live in communities that have been disenfranchised and targeted by CPS are in survival mode, with limited trusted options for support. Many state-funded service options available in communities are staffed by mandated reporters whose presence makes many families feel unsafe to access due to the implicit threat of child welfare involvement.

Given this context, the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund is an **opportunity to resource local and grassroots organizations that families trust.** In this way, the Fund will strengthenfamilies by funding community-based groups that prioritize the particular needs, desires, and aspirations of the children and families they serve.

The Fund's Structure

- **Community-Driven Investment**: The Fund would direct state dollars to groups that are deeply embedded in communities and responsive to community needs. Grantees will be determined by a local advisory committee who has been identified by the community, composed of individuals with lived experience and individuals with professional experience in relevant public system policy and community engagement.
- **Operational Accountability**: Since the vision is to prioritize small, local groups and organizations that may not have capacity to seek out and apply for state grants, the Fund will operate through a statewide "backbone" organization, which will provide technical assistance and support for communities to determine which kinds of community investments they want, support local

[1] The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund Working Group includes: Chijindu Obiofuma and Julia Davis from Children's Defense Fund-New York, Joyce McMillan from JMAC for Families, Halimah Washington from RISE, Nora McCarthy from NYC Family Policy Project, Angela Burton from Repeal CAPTA, Crystal Charles from the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, Brad Hansen from Families Together in NYS, Jeannette Bocanegra from Justice4Families, Yomika Burnett from Prevent Child Abuse NY, Deirdra Nesbeth from Fostering Youth Success Alliance, and Jasmine Wali from Redlich Horwitz Foundation.

advisory committees in soliciting and evaluating grant proposals, and distribute funding according to local advisory committee decisions.

- **Reporting and Evaluation**: The backbone organization would be responsible for documenting the grants, collecting information for evaluation and producing reports to the Legislature and the public that examine the process, impact, and effects of the Fund's community-led grant-making process and state-funded investments.

By investing in local projects and organizations through a community-led grant-making process and capacity-building support, the Fund will strengthen and expand community assets. The ultimate goal of the Fund is to facilitate and normalize a caring, community-driven resource allocation approach that helps families flourish. **Ensuring that the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund is part of the enacted budget this year is critical to our shared vision for children and families across New York.**

With thanks,

1. 315 PRAYZE PROJECT
2. 914United
3. Adoption and Foster Family Coalition of New York
4. AspireHopeNY, Inc
5. Astor Services
6. Behavioral Health Services North
7. Black Child Development Institute - New York State
8. BLIS Collective
9. Bronx Defenders
10. Brooklyn Defender Services
11. CAPTAIN Community Human Services
12. CASA-NYC
13. Center for Family Life in Sunset Park
14. Center for Family Representation
15. Children's Defense Fund-New York
16. Children's Rights
17. Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
18. COFCCA
19. Community Rising Project
20. Community Voices Heard
21. Diverse Mosaic Community Center
22. ECLI-VIBES
23. EdTrust-New York
24. Euphemia
25. Families Together in New York State
26. Family For Justice
27. Family Resource Network
28. Fearless Queens
29. Flower City Noire Collective, INC
30. Forestdale, Inc.

31. Fostering Youth Success Alliance
32. FPWA
33. Frank Chapman Memorial Institute Inc.
34. Good Shepherd Services
35. Goodeee Management LLC
36. Graham
37. Healthy Transitions
38. HOPE585
39. How Our Lives Link Altogether! (H.O.L.L.A!)
40. JMAC For Families
41. JNE Venture Capital
42. Justice for Families
43. Krase Consulting
44. Lawyers For Children
45. MJ Dessables Consulting
46. Multi Assistance Resource Centers
47. Narrowing the Front Door to NYC Child Welfare System Workgroup
48. New Directions Youth and Family Services
49. New Hour for Women & Children LI
50. New Hour For Women and Children
51. New Tomorrow
52. New York City Community Garden Coalition
53. New York Junior Tennis League
54. New York State Citizen Review Panels
55. New York State Council of Churches
56. New York State Defenders Association
57. New Yorkers For Children
58. Northern Regional Center for Independent Living, Inc.
59. Northern Rivers Family of Services
60. NYC Family Policy Project
61. NYU Family Defense Clinic
62. Parents Supporting Parents NY/Moms United for Black Lives New York City
63. Prevent Child Abuse New York
64. Rise
65. RMAPI (Rochester-Monroe Anti Poverty Initiative)
66. RocACTS
67. Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
68. The Bronx Defenders
69. The Children's Agenda
70. The Children's Village and Harlem Dowling
71. The Legal Aid Society
72. The New York Foundling
73. The RED Bookshelf
74. United Way of Mid Rural New York
75. United Way of New York City
76. United Way of the Dutchess-Orange Region
77. United Way of the Greater Capital Region
78. University Settlement

79. Vanderheyden Hall Inc.
80. VOICE Buffalo
81. Voices of Women Organizing Project
82. We Are Revolutionary
83. Westchester Children's Association
84. Westchester Community College
85. Youth Communication
86. Youth Represent