



Westchester Children's Association's Statement in Response to the New York State Fiscal Year 2025 Budget

With a steadfast commitment to ensuring every child is healthy, safe and prepared for life's challenges regardless of race or zip code, WCA collaborates with partners at the local, state and national level to identify children's needs; educate the public and policy makers; promote policies and programs that improve children's lives; and protect public investments for children and youth.

In our FY 2025 budget recommendations, we prioritized child poverty, youth justice, homelessness, and mental health as prominent areas of concern due to their significant impact on children and youth. Despite our bold and unwavering advocacy efforts, this year's budget overlooks the daily challenges endured by children and youth and makes minimal effort to ensure that New York's children and youth have equitable access to the necessary resources that will enable them to thrive.

As the cost of living continues to rise, children and youth statewide are grappling with significant challenges. While initiatives like the **Working Families Tax Credit** could make New York more affordable for families, the budget only offers a one-year supplement to the existing **Empire State Child Credit**. These benefits vary, being smaller for the poorest families.

Despite the increasing rates of homelessness, the FY2025 New York State Budget overlooked the critical issue of affordable housing. As a result, many children and families are forced into overcrowded shelters, onto the streets, or into unsafe and inadequate living conditions, often doubling or tripling up in shared housing. The lack of funding for crucial initiatives like the **Housing Access Voucher Program**, which provides vouchers to offset rental costs, and the statewide **Right to Counsel program**, offering free legal representation in housing court proceedings, further exacerbates the situation. Governor Hochul's failure to address this urgent issue perpetuates the cycle of homelessness and marginalization for those most in need, worsening the challenges and deepening the housing crisis.



Additionally, the FY2025 New York State Budget missed an opportunity to strengthen the victories of the Raise the Age (RTA) legislation. We advocated for a **Youth Justice Innovation Fund**, empowering community-based organizations to receive funding directly, and demanded the removal of barriers preventing New York City from accessing vital RTA funds. Despite the valiant efforts of our champions in the Senate and Assembly, these crucial amendments were left out.

While we are disappointed in the lack of bold support for children and youth in New York, a significant achievement stands out: the implementation of **continuous Medicaid and Child Health Plus coverage** for eligible children aged 0-6. With nearly 45% of New York's children covered by Medicaid and Child Health Plus, eliminating the requirement for annual re-enrollment ensures consistent access to crucial health services during their developmental years.

To address the overlooked challenges faced by children and youth in New York, WCA will continue its steadfast advocacy efforts, rallying support from partners at all levels to ensure New York's children and youth have equitable access to resources essential for their well-being and success.