



## **2025 COUNTY BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Since 1914, Westchester Children’s Association has served as Westchester County’s only independent child advocacy organization. As part of the Campaign for Kids coalition—comprising over 100 organizations and individuals dedicated to improving opportunities and support for young people—**our 2025 budget recommendations prioritize children’s safety, housing needs, and mental, social-emotional, and physical well-being.** We emphasize the need to ensure equitable access to resources for all children, youth, and families across Westchester County.

### **Invest in Kids:**

Sustain financial support for community-based youth development programs, ensuring ongoing funding for all Invest in Kids initiatives. These programs play a vital role in safeguarding children and youth, assisting working families and promoting academic achievement. In the current climate of rapid change and uncertainty, these initiatives are crucial for establishing and reinforcing connections that contribute to the well-being of children throughout Westchester County.

### **Child & Youth Homelessness and Affordable Housing:**

Housing instability in Westchester County critically affects children, youth, and families, particularly those in overcrowded or unsafe living conditions. Current definitions of homelessness are too narrow, excluding many who live in doubled- or tripled-up households. As a result, these families—especially those with children—lack access to essential resources and support. To address these urgent needs, we recommend the following budget actions:

- **Broaden the Westchester County definition of homelessness by supporting the existing work group “Shockingly Severely Overcrowded Housing”** to create “adequate”, “safe” and “secure” standards for housing so that more children, youth, and families qualify for support especially those in **doubled- and tripled-up housing.**
- Continue funding for the Westchester County Office of Housing Counsel and Access to Counsel legislation to allow for a **full implementation of services including workforce development and resources** that ensure tenants facing eviction receive essential legal representation.

- Utilize public-private nonprofit partnerships to service low-income families and **increase investments and access to affordable housing** in Westchester.
- Add County funding for rent arrears to reduce evictions.

### **Early Childhood Supports:**

Quality early childhood support is vital for improving maternal and child health, enhancing family stability, and increasing school readiness. These programs help parents and caregivers tackle developmental challenges and promote healthy growth, laying a strong foundation for lifelong success. To advance these goals, we recommend the following budget actions:

Childcare:

- **Maintain existing funding for Westchester Works Childcare Scholarship**, totaling \$3 million, as well as expand the scholarship with an additional \$250,000.
- **Improve the availability of childcare** for children experiencing homelessness.

Head Start & Early Head Start:

- Increase access to Early Head Start and Head Start programs by identifying areas of need and **offering supplemental funding for expansion** and retention of staff.
- **Allocate funding to provide transportation stipends or subsidies** for childcare workers and families enrolled in childcare centers.
- **Create and fund a subsidy program or provide slots** in existing childcare programs specifically for the children of childcare workers.

### **Children's Mental Health**

- **Allocate funds to WCA to coordinate efforts to improve the mental wellness of school age children** in collaboration with county departments, schools, and community-based providers.
- **Continue roundtable discussions on children's mental health** to collect and analyze data and to find workable solutions to support the full continuum of care needed.
- **Provide additional funding to the Youth Bureau to support out-of-school programs that provide mental health support** and enhance social-emotional development for youth, building upon the support they receive in schools

Child Poverty –

- **Provide funding to the relevant county departments that provide poverty-fighting services related to housing, food, and clothing insecurities**, and ensure easier access to those services by informing parents of their eligibility.