



From left to right: Elissa Ramos-Feliciano, Assistant Vice President of Housing Programs at Westhab, Inc., Averyann Zuvic, Chief Impact Officer of United Way of Westchester and Putnam, Sarah Carmona, MPA, Government Relations Manager at 914Cares, and Tami Wilson, Chief Operating Officer at Feeding Westchester

WCA Hosts 2nd Annual Poverty Pulse Conversation

On December 9, 2025, the Westchester Children's Association (WCA) released its latest quarterly *Poverty Pulse* report, offering a timely and detailed look at rising poverty and the growing demand for food, housing, and other basic necessities across Westchester County. While some federal data points to declining poverty rates, the report reveals a different reality for families and children who rely on consistent support to meet everyday needs.

Launched in November 2024, *Poverty Pulse* draws on real-time data from trusted community partners, including **914Cares, Feeding Westchester, The Sharing Shelf, Westhab, and United Way of Westchester and Putnam**. These organizations work directly with families, providing essential services such as food assistance, housing support, and clothing. Their frontline insights ensure the report reflects what households are experiencing right now.

"When we use the term 'pulse,' we mean data that is as real-time and accurate as possible," said Adam Rabinovitch, WCA Executive Director. "We want it to reflect what families are going through today so that we can respond in meaningful ways."

The findings reinforce what many families and service providers have long understood: traditional federal poverty measures often fail to capture the true cost of

living. Based on outdated methodologies, they do not account for regional expenses like housing, utilities, and child care — costs that are especially high in Westchester County.

"Despite a reported drop in the federal poverty rate, we continue to see rising demand for essential services," said Limarie Cabrera, WCA Director of Data, Finance, and Operations. "The current measure simply does not reflect the daily reality for families struggling to provide for their children."

These challenges were echoed during a panel discussion featuring representatives from each Poverty Pulse partner organization, hosted by Tiffany Hamilton at the YWCA White Plains. Panelists shared firsthand accounts of increasing need across the county.

Deborah Blatt, Founder and Executive Director of The Sharing Shelf, noted a significant rise in demand: "At times this year, we saw a 45 percent increase. Month (Article continues on page 5)

POVERTY PULSE

The Poverty Pulse dashboard, published quarterly by WCA, highlights rising needs for children and families across Westchester County, bringing real time data to the forefront, guiding community action.

Ensuring every child is healthy, safe, and prepared for life's challenges regardless of race or zip code.

Dear Friends,

As we welcome the arrival of spring, we are reminded that this season represents renewal, growth, and new possibilities. At Westchester Children's Association (WCA), those same themes guide our work every day as we continue advocating for policies and programs that ensure all children in Westchester County have the opportunity to grow, learn, and thrive.

Over the past several months, WCA has continued to advance its mission by elevating the needs and voices of children and families across our county. Through research, policy analysis, and strong partnerships with community organizations and advocates, we are working to ensure that decision-makers have the information they need to make policies that truly support children's well-being. We are proud of the role WCA plays in bringing people together, identifying solutions, and pushing for meaningful change.



"It's about dignity, equity, and saving lives where the need is greatest... [Advocacy] Work reminds me how powerful strong systems and partnerships can be, anywhere in the world."

This year, we have been especially focused on strengthening support for families and expanding opportunities for young people. From advocating for policies that improve access to early childhood services to supporting youth justice reforms that protect young people's rights and invest more in communities, our team continues to push forward priorities that help children reach their full potential. Our work is grounded in the belief that when we invest in children, we strengthen our entire community.

We are also proud of the partnerships that make this work possible. Collaboration is at the heart of WCA's approach, and we are grateful for the many organizations, advocates, policymakers, and community members who stand with us in support of Westchester's children. By working together, we can amplify our impact and ensure that children's needs remain at the center of important policy conversations.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the opportunities the coming months will bring. WCA will continue to advocate for policies that promote equity, opportunity, and well-being for children across the county. We will also bring our community together through important conversations, including our fifth **Mental Health Roundtable in April**. In addition, our biennial **Spring Gala** will take place on **Wednesday, May 13**, where we will celebrate the leaders, partners, and supporters who help drive our mission forward. We will also take time to recognize Maris Krasnow, our long time Board Member who passed away in September with the Edith C. Macy Award for her years of dedication to children and education.

None of this work would be possible without the support of our community. Whether you partner with us, participate in our events, share our advocacy efforts, or support our work in other ways, your engagement helps create meaningful change for children and families across Westchester County.

Thank you for standing with Westchester Children's Association and for believing in a future where every child has the opportunity to succeed. Together, we can continue building a stronger, more supportive community for the next generation.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Adam Rabinovitch', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Adam Rabinovitch, *Executive Director*
Westchester Children's Association

WCA's Advocacy Efforts Bring the Team to Albany and Washington, DC to Support Early Child Care

At WCA, we know that strong early childhood programs require advocacy at every level of government. Program and Policy Associate Gabriella Nanna recently attended the National Head Start Association's Winter Leadership Conference to share key priorities directly with federal decision makers.

Head Start, now in its 60th year, remains one of the nation's most comprehensive early childhood programs. It supports child development while also providing families with nutrition, health, and mental health services. Despite its impact, programs continue to face staffing shortages, delayed funding, and administrative challenges that limit enrollment and affect quality care.

During the conference, advocates met with staff from the offices of Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Chuck Schumer to call for increased federal funding and support for legislation such as the HEADWAY Act, Head Start for Our Future Act, SEED Act, and PATH to Education Act. These efforts aim to strengthen the workforce, improve compensation, and support professional development. WCA strongly supports these priorities.

These federal efforts connect directly to WCA's work in Westchester County. Locally, WCA champions the Westchester Works Child Care Scholarship and participates in the Head Start Work Group to address system level challenges. However, expanding access alone is not enough. Programs need a stable and well supported workforce to serve families effectively.



Above, L to R: Rosalie Moran, Early Education at Grand St Settlement; Gabriella Nanna, WCA; Vernex Harding; Head Start of Rockland

Below, L to R: Adam Rabinovitch, WCA; Nicole Rebori, Child Care Council of Westchester; Assemblymember Dana Levenberg; Laura Newman, Child Care Council of Westchester; Howard Milbert, Ossining Children's Center



WCA is urging New York State to strengthen the Child Care Assistance Program and create a permanent workforce retention fund. WCA's Executive Director, Adam Rabinovitch was in Albany advocating for state efforts. These changes would help programs hire and retain staff, expand enrollment, and provide consistent services.

Early childhood systems are strongest when local, state, and federal efforts work together. By aligning these investments, policymakers can ensure programs are stable, fully staffed, and able to meet the needs of children and families.

This summer, WCA will host an early childhood seminar, bringing together providers, lawmakers, and community stakeholders to continue this important conversation. Stay tuned for more details.

new faces @ WCA

We're excited to welcome **Brandon Washington** to the Westchester Children's Association team as our new Data Analyst and Storyteller. A lifelong Westchester resident from White Plains, Brandon earned his B.S. in Physics from Binghamton University in 2023 and brings a passion for technology, data analytics, and expanding equitable access to education. He has worked as a private tutor and partnered with local schools to provide pro bono support to students, gaining firsthand insight into the barriers children face. Since graduating, Brandon has held roles in analytics, teaching, and supporting operations for students with academic and mental health challenges. At WCA, he looks forward to using data to inform policies and programs, and he plans to begin a master's in Data Science this fall. We're thrilled to have Brandon on board and look forward to the impact his work will have in strengthening our data-driven advocacy for Westchester's children.



Court Watcher Program Expanded to Peekskill

Thanks to the generosity of the Jandon Foundation, WCA will expand its Court Watcher Program to Peekskill City Court this spring, strengthening efforts to better understand and address the growing challenges facing families at risk of eviction in Northern Westchester.

Launched in 2024, WCA's Court Watcher Program engages trained community volunteers to observe eviction proceedings and document trends affecting tenants and families across the county. The program currently has active volunteers observing cases in Greenburgh, Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, Ossining, and Yonkers. The expansion to Peekskill marks an important next step in building a countywide understanding of housing instability and its impact on children and families.

Interested in being a Court Watcher?

Contact Program and Policy Manager Gabriella Nanna at gnanna@wca4kids.org



Investing in Children, Strengthening Families: NYS FY 2026–27 Budget Priorities

As New York State leaders negotiate the FY 2026–27 budget, their decisions will directly affect children and families across Westchester. With rising costs, housing challenges, and growing youth mental health needs, this budget is a crucial opportunity to invest in stability, opportunity, and well-being.

WCA is working with elected officials, community partners, and families to ensure the budget reflects what children need to thrive—no matter their race or zip code. Our recommendations focus on solutions that help families now and build stronger futures.

Families face difficult choices every day: paying rent, putting food on the table, or accessing early learning programs. Investments in programs like the Child Care Assistance Program, increased childcare worker pay, and universal childcare bridges can make quality care more accessible while supporting a strong workforce. Expanding the Empire State Child Credit, strengthening cash assistance, and expanding housing programs help families meet basic needs and plan ahead.



Youth mental health is another priority. Increased behavioral health services and a new Child & Family Wellbeing Fund provide young people with the supports they need to thrive. Policies like Solutions Not Suspensions (SNS) and the Youth Justice Innovation Fund shift youth justice toward opportunity and healing.

Finally, eliminating rental charges in shelters and expanding housing programs ensures children and youth have a safe, stable place to sleep, learn, and grow.

Through these investments, New York can create a future where children thrive, families are supported, and every young person has the chance to succeed.

FY 2026-27 NYS Budget Recommendations

Early Childhood Supports

- Create a permanent state fund to increase child care worker compensation and establish a minimum pay scale.
- Fully fund the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) with a \$2.3B investment, including \$1.8B for NYC and \$500M for the rest of the state.
- Implement universal child care bridge projects using community eligibility and capped-fee models (\$100/week) to expand toward statewide free child care.

Child Poverty & Economic Security

- Increase the Empire State Child Credit amount to \$1,500 per child, index to inflation & make it permanent.
- Make the Housing Access Voucher Program a permanent statewide program funded at \$250M annually.
- Increase Cash Assistance benefits by 100%, index to inflation annually, align earned income rules, and remove restrictive resource limits to expand eligibility and support family financial stability.

Youth Well-Being

- Invest \$200M to increase access to children’s behavioral health outpatient services.
- Establish a \$30M Child & Family Wellbeing Fund to invest in community-driven supports for children and families.
- Pass legislation to ensure that children in foster care across New York State benefit from the federal funds intended for them.

Child & Youth Homelessness

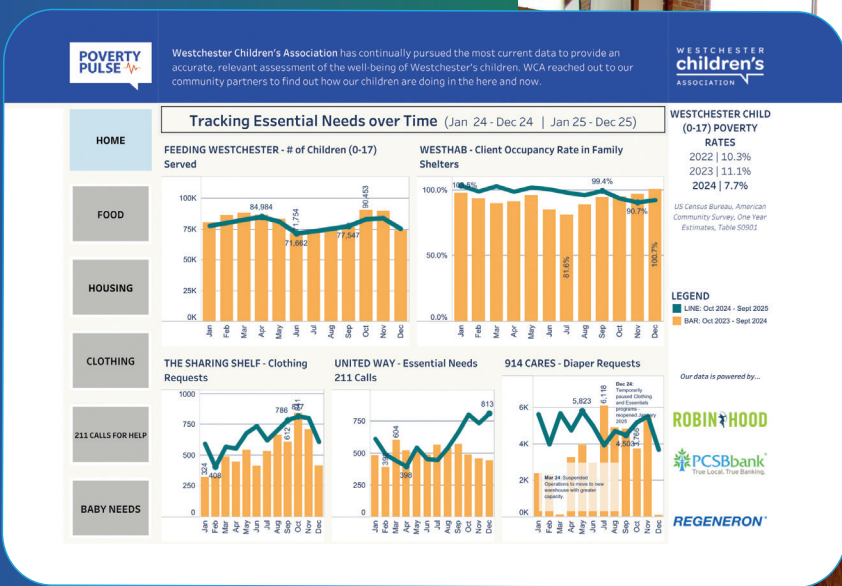
- Pass A.745/S.3787 and eliminate rental charges for individuals and families living in homeless shelters.

Youth Justice Reform

- Allocate \$50M from Raise the Age funds to support the Youth Justice Innovation Fund.
- Pass Solutions Not Suspensions (A.118/S.134) and shift away from punitive school discipline practices
- Pass #Right2RemainSilent (A.2620B/S.878B) and ensure young people have early access to counsel during law enforcement interrogations.
- Pass the Youth Justice & Opportunities Act (A.8492/S.643) and expand rehabilitation and opportunity pathways for system involved youth.

Food & Nutrition Supports

- Invest \$244M in a state-funded nutrition program for income-eligible New York households with children excluded from SNAP due to immigration status.
- Transition to electronic chip cards to prevent theft.
- Allocate \$30M state funding for WIC to meet rising demand and serve more children.
- Provide \$75M for the Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and \$75M NourishNY to strengthen New York’s emergency food systems.



The WCA Poverty Pulse Dashboard was unveiled in front of audience of community partners and decision-makers on December 9, 2025.

Poverty Pulse Conversation, continued from Page 1

after month, there were at least 100 additional requests for clothing. The need continues to grow.”

Food insecurity remains a critical concern. Tami Wilson, COO of Feeding Westchester, explained, “Last year we distributed 21.1 million pounds of food, compared to 23.2 million the year before. Those numbers reflect our capacity — not the level of need. Even with significantly more resources, families would still be waiting.”

Working families are increasingly impacted. Avery Zuvic, Chief Impact Officer at United Way of Westchester and Putnam, highlighted that many callers are employed but still struggling. “People are working — sometimes multiple jobs — and still cannot afford basic expenses like utilities or groceries. By the time they reach out to us, they have exhausted other options.”

Housing instability is another growing concern. Elissa Ramos, Asst. Vice President of Housing Programs at Westhab, shared that shelter capacity reached 90 percent this June, up from 71 percent the previous year. As more families seek shelter, children face disruptions to their education, health care, and overall well-being.

During the event, WCA also introduced its new Interactive *Poverty Pulse Dashboard*, a centralized tool that compiles data from partner organizations and is updated quarterly. Designed for policymakers, donors, and community leaders, the dashboard supports

more informed decision-making and faster responses to emerging needs. The project was developed with support from the *Regeneron Data for Good Program*, which connects skilled volunteers with local nonprofits.

More than 50 stakeholders, including community leaders and elected officials, attended the event. Tiffany Hamilton, Executive Director of the YWCA White Plains and Central Westchester, challenged the audience to act: “What will you do with this data? Will you use it to inform funding, shape policy, and advocate for families? Our children are watching who will step forward to create change.”

The message throughout the discussion was clear: data alone is not enough. Meaningful progress will require collaboration, investment, and action. WCA and its partners remain committed to expanding services, increasing access to cash assistance and tax credits, and advocating for policies that better reflect the true cost of living.

“We must continue to show up for our children,” Rabinovitch said. “Our goal is to cut child poverty in half by 2032. Achieving that will require all of us — working together, using data to drive change, and ensuring every child has the opportunity to thrive.”

To explore the *Poverty Pulse Dashboard*, updated in March 2026, visit: wca4kids.org/dashboards

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WESTCHESTER CHILDREN'S ASSOCIATION
cordially invites you to attend our

Gala

MAY 13, 2026

5:30-8:30 PM

**C.V. Rich Mansion
305 Ridgeway, White Plains, NY**

Please join us for an evening of
COCKTAILS, DINNER & AUCTION
supporting our work to improve
the lives of children and families.

Honoring

MARIS H. KRASNOW, ED.D
WCA Board Member and Educator
in posthumous recognition of
her lifelong dedication to children

R.S.V.P.

BY MAY 1, 2026

Purchase sponsorships,
reserve tickets or donate online at
wca4kids.org/event/2026springgala



Early bird pricing for individual tickets
available until April 15, 2026