Recommendations for the 2027 Westchester County Budget

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 more than 50 organizations united to improve opportunities and support for young people, our recommendations for the **2027 Westchester County Budget** prioritize children's safety, well-being, and access to essential resources. We urge the County to continue investing in the programs, services, and systems that help children and families thrive across Westchester.

Invest in Kids:

Maintain County funding for Invest in Kids initiatives and other positive youth development programs that create safe, supportive opportunities for young people to learn, grow, and thrive while strengthening families and communities across Westchester.

Child Poverty:

The rising cost of basic necessities continues to place pressure on families across Westchester. Ensuring families can access food, housing, clothing, and other essential resources is critical to reducing economic hardships and supporting children's stability and well-being.

- **Strengthen County funding for departments and community partners that connect families to essential resources, including food, housing, clothing, and other basic needs, while improving awareness of and access to available supports.**

Child and Youth Homelessness and Affordable Housing:

Housing instability can have lasting consequences for children and youth, disrupting education, affecting mental health, and undermining a family's ability to achieve long-term stability. Yet many young people experiencing homelessness, particularly those living doubled or tripled up, remain largely invisible and may struggle to access the supports they need. Westchester must ensure its response recognizes the full scope of housing instability and reaches children and families before they fall into crisis.

- **Strengthen County investments in housing stability and homelessness prevention** to help families remain safely housed and reduce the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

- **Broaden the County's approach to identifying and responding to homelessness** by recognizing whether housing is adequate, safe, and secure, including the experiences of children and families living doubled or tripled up.

- **Restore funding for the Access to Counsel Program to at least $4 million, plus sufficient additional funding to cover applicable contractual cost-of-living adjustments.**

Early Childhood Supports:

Affordable, high-quality child care is essential to both healthy child development and family economic stability. Without access to affordable care, families face barriers to employment and economic security, while children risk losing the consistent, supportive learning environment they need to thrive.

- **Restore funding for the Westchester Works Child Care Scholarship to at least $3.3 million, with additional investments to address the growing demand and support families currently awaiting assistance.**
- **Allocate funding to extend child care hours for Early Head Start and Head Start families,** including scholarships for families and support for the staffing and operational costs needed to provide care beyond the federally funded program day.

Youth Well-Being:

County investment in youth well-being is critical to ensuring young people have access to mental health services, social-emotional supports, and community-based resources that promote healthy development and long-term success.

- **Invest in Westchester Children's Association's youth mental health advocacy efforts**, including data publications and the annual Youth Mental Health Roundtable, to elevate emerging needs and inform Countywide strategies.

- **Expand County investments in mental health supports within after-school and out-of-school programming**, including increased access to trained service providers who can support young people's mental and social-emotional development.
- **Sustain County funding for Early Steps Forward** to strengthen access to mental health and well-being services for children and youth across Westchester County.