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The Education Trust–New York



United Way of New York State



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October 5, 2020

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented time. As you construct your plan to build back better, we request that you put the needs of New York’s low-income children and families at the center, particularly those facing the obstacles created by historic, structural, and ongoing racism. As you have pointed out throughout the pandemic, poverty is a significant contributing factor to the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 experienced in underserved communities. We support your call to end child poverty now and urge you to take concrete steps, this year, to achieve this goal, beginning by committing to cut child poverty in New York in half by 2030.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, children in New York were more likely to live in poverty than children in 31 other states, with 19% experiencing poverty in 2019. Children are more likely to live in poverty than other age groups and are more vulnerable to its effects. Structural and systemic racism have contributed to rates of child poverty among New York children of color that exceed 30%. In some communities, including Rochester and the Bronx, more than 50% of the children live in poverty. Poverty can have a devastating impact on children’s development. Unmitigated, the stress of poverty can alter brain development – causing permanent changes in the structure and functioning of the brain. As a result, many children who experience poverty face significant challenges – poor health, academic obstacles, and lower earnings – for the rest of their lives.

Prior to the pandemic, New York had the 11th largest economy in the world, yet its child poverty rate has remained above 20% for most of the past decade. Several months into the pandemic, mounting evidence shows families with children are being disproportionately affected by the related economic downturn. Many children live in households that have

missed rent or mortgage payments, are experiencing COVID-19 induced food shortages, or where a parent has lost his or her job. COVID-19 has the potential to drastically increase the child poverty rates in New York.

Absent immediate intervention, the negative impacts of the pandemic and its economic impacts on New York's children will be devastating and long lasting. In your June daily briefings, you named child poverty as an unacceptable problem and vowed not to "wait for next year" to tackle it. You also recognized that reducing child poverty will take strong political will. We agree, and ask you to lead decisively and without delay to build the needed political will and set New York on a path to sharply reducing child poverty by 2030.

We urge you to:

- Make a public, binding commitment to cut child poverty in half, with a focus on reducing racial inequity, in New York by 2030, and take steps this year to meet that target;
- Protect from budget cuts and expand New York's existing anti-poverty policies, including SNAP and other food supports; housing subsidies; child welfare preventive services; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families; education and youth programming; and primary and behavioral health supports across the developmental continuum;
- Expand and strengthen New York's Earned Income Tax Credit to align with New York's minimum wage, make it available to more hard-working immigrants, and distribute it quarterly;
- Expand and strengthen New York's child tax credit to include currently excluded young children and families in deep poverty;
- Expand access to subsidized child care and achieve universal prekindergarten.

Central to a "better" New York must be a New York in which no child is hungry, homeless, or experiences poverty. Creating that New York will require creative, intentional government interventions at every level – and bold leadership. Without significant systemic changes to the way the State utilizes policy and budget measures to combat poverty, New York will continue to allow millions of our youngest residents to endure the trauma of poverty. Failing to act also will cost New York more tax dollars in the long run, when we could have taken a more preventative approach with a cost-effective, proactive investment.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration. We are eager to meet with you to explore next steps and look forward to the opportunity to work together to rebuild a better New York for our children, and all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

Children's Defense Fund-New York
Citizens' Committee for Children of NY (CCC)
NYS American Academy of Pediatrics, Chapters 1, 2 & 3
Prevent Child Abuse NY
Robin Hood
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

The Children's Agenda
The Education Trust-New York
United Way of New York State
Westchester Children's Association
YWCAs of NYS

cc: Sheila Poole, Commissioner, NYS Office of Children and Family Services
Howard Zucker, Commissioner, NYS Department of Health
Michael Hein, Commissioner, NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
Roberta Reardon, Commissioner, NYS Department of Labor
Michael Schmidt, Commissioner, NYS Department of Taxation and Finance
Melissa DeRosa, Secretary to the Governor
David Yassky, Director of State Policy, Office of the Governor Andrew M. Cuomo
Richard Becker, Deputy Secretary for Health and Human Services
Kerri Neifeld, Assistant Secretary for Human Services & Mental Hygiene, Office of
Governor Andrew M. Cuomo
Jihoon Kim, Senior Policy Advisor for Human Services & Mental Hygiene, Office of
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Jim Malatras, Chancellor, The State University of New York
Renee Rider, Executive Director, NYS Council on Children and Families