December 6, 2019

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

Dear Governor Cuomo,

On behalf of the undersigned child and family advocates, social justice organizations, child and family serving agencies, business and faith leaders, we urge you to prioritize reducing child poverty in your 2020-2021 Executive Budget – and beyond.

New York children are more likely to live in poverty than in 31 other states. This is not a new trend. For more than a decade, the percentage of New York children living in poverty has stagnated at about 20%. And, due to structural inequities, child poverty among New York children of color has long exceeded 30%. In some New York communities, the child poverty rate exceeds 50%.

Currently, 743,000 New York children live in poverty, with an additional 795,000 children residing in low-income households living between 100 and 200% of the poverty level. That’s over 1.5 million New York children living in families struggling to pay rent, heat their homes, get transportation, and feed their children. Notably, the younger the child, the more likely the child is to experience poverty, with babies and toddlers under age three experiencing poverty at the highest rate (23.4%), exactly when they are most vulnerable to poverty’s impacts.

With the 11th biggest economy in the world (just after Canada), and a $175 billion annual budget, New York certainly has the means to tackle child poverty. Instead, New York leaders have made the choice, year after year, to allow hundreds of thousands of New York children to experience poverty. And they have repeatedly made that choice even though it is now well understood that experiencing poverty as a child can cause devastating and enduring harm to children’s physical and mental health, educational success, and future earnings.

We urge you to make a different choice this year by taking the following, bold steps:

1. Set a target and a plan to cut child poverty in half in New York by 2030. Growing evidence from peer nations and states shows that coordinated anti-poverty initiatives can drive a nation, state, or community to dramatically reduce child poverty. Setting a target and a coordinated plan will help ensure the state does not fall prey to pressure to balance the budget by diverting funds from one child poverty-reducing program to bolster another.
The United Kingdom set a target of reducing child poverty 50% in 10 years, 1999 to 2009.\(^7\) It achieved this target by using short- and long-term evidence-based strategies, including working family tax credits.\(^8\) Last year, California set a target of reducing child poverty by 50% in 20 years.\(^9\) It will be using multiple evidence-based strategies, including a young child tax credit, to meet its target.\(^10\)

2. **Implement evidence-based strategies each year to set New York on a path to reducing child poverty and moving families into economic stability.** To significantly reduce child poverty, New York will need to make substantial investments in numerous, complementary strategies over a number of years. This year, the State should begin by implementing two proven strategies it is positioned to advance, recognizing that these strategies alone will not suffice; the state must also prioritize policies that create more affordable housing, expand access to transportation, reform New York’s criminal justice system, among many others:

A. **Orient the state’s tax code to benefit low-income families, children, and young adults by expanding and strengthening refundable tax credits.**

   As a first step, New York should strengthen the Empire State Child Credit by (1) removing the Credit’s phase-in so that it is available to the state’s poorest children, and acts more like a child allowance; (2) establishing a $1,000 young child credit to give the most help to babies and toddlers who are most likely to live in poverty and are currently excluded from the state’s child tax credit; and (3) expanding the existing Credit to $500 for children four and older.

   Robust child allowances are the most effective strategy for reducing child poverty. The landmark 2019 *Consensus Study Report: A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty* by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that a $250 per month child allowance for low-income children could, by itself, reduce child poverty nationally by more than 40%. If New York were to provide a $1,000 credit for young children, adding that to the $2,000 per child federal child tax credit, tens of thousands of young, low-income NY children would receive the equivalent of an allowance equal to $250 per month.\(^11\)

   Creating a young child tax credit in New York through our Empire State Child Credit would have the added benefit of providing much needed support to immigrant families ineligible to access many other supports – including the federal child tax credit – as New York’s child tax credit is structured such that it is available to many hard-working immigrant families. It would also reach those families experiencing deep poverty who are excluded from the federal child tax credit (which begins to phase-in at $2,500 of income).\(^12\)

B. **Substantially increase New York’s investment in high-quality child care.**

   Child care expenses are a leading contributor to family poverty and economic instability. Nationally, one-third of low-income families who pay for child care for their young children are pushed into poverty by child care expenses.\(^13\) Lack of access to child care causes many parents – overwhelmingly women – to drop out of the workforce for longer periods of time, sharply reducing family income for the period the caregiver is out of the workforce, and lowering future earnings and retirement savings.\(^14\)
The Governor’s Child Care Availability Task Force has been meeting regularly for a year, and is seriously considering ambitious reforms to move the state toward providing universal access to high quality, affordable child care. But that won’t happen overnight. It is critical that the state make substantial, building block investments to enable more families to access high quality care this year.

We look forward to working with you to reducing child poverty in New York to enable more of our children, our families, our communities – to thrive.

cc: Sheila Poole, Commissioner, NYS Office of Children and Family Services
    Michael Hein, Commissioner, NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
    Roberta Reardon, Commissioner, NYS Department of Labor
    Howard Zucker, Commissioner, NYS Department of Health
    Renee Rider, Executive Director, NYS Council on Children and Families
    Melissa DeRosa, Secretary to the Governor
    Paul Francis, Deputy Secretary for Health and Human Services
    Kerri Neifeld, Assistant Secretary for Human Services

Respectfully yours,

Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance
Alliance for Quality Education
Center for Children's Initiatives
Center for Family Representation
Chenango United Way
Child Development Council of Central New York, Inc.
Children’s Aid of New York City
Children’s Defense Fund-New York
Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York
City of Cortland
Committee for Hispanic Children and Families
Cortland Chamber of Commerce
Cortland County Family YMCA
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies
Early Care and Learning Council
Education Trust-New York
Fiscal Policy Institute
MercyFirst
Neighborhood Trust Financial Partners
New York State Council of Churches
Northern Rivers
Office of the Monroe County Public Defender
Prevent Child Abuse New York
Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services
SUNY Cortland Child Care Center
The Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York
The Children's Agenda
The Financial Clinic
United Neighborhood Houses
United Way of Buffalo and Erie County
United Way of Dutchess-Orange County
United Way of Greater Oswego County
United Way of New York City
United Way of New York State
Westchester Children’s Association
Western New York Women's Foundation
YMCA of Ithaca and Tompkins County
YWCA of New York State

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