

The Families Together 2025 Policy Agenda is created by families and young people with social, emotional, behavioral and cross-systems challenges.

Families Together in New York State (FTNYS) represents a statewide network of families and young people with lived experience in systems such as mental health, addiction, child welfare, juvenile justice, developmental disability, education, and social services.

FTNYS believes the proposals outlined in this document are crucial and urgent investments toward youth and family wellbeing. We urge the state to fund them by any means necessary- be it new tax revenue, reinvestment, or funds recovered from managed care organizations.

This is a youth behavioral health crisis. Families need a workforce, not waitlists.

Add an additional \$5.5 million in flexible State Aid to Localities funds under program code 1650 for Family and Youth Peer Support Services to provide unrestricted, community-based support for families and young people, regardless of their insurance status.

Raise reimbursement rates across peer support services by aligning peer support reimbursement rates across all settings with the 150% rate increase provided to clinical settings under the Mental Health Outpatient Treatment and Rehabilitative Services (MHOTRS) Program.

Require commercial insurers to make the same broad range of services currently available to children, youth, and families with Medicaid insurance available to New Yorkers with commercial coverage. This includes Child and Family Treatment and Support Services (CFTSS) and Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS).

Add \$195M to rates for outpatient clinics, CFTSS and HCBS youth mental health services for children under Medicaid and CHP to expand access to 26,000 additional children, youth and families.

Add a 7.8% increase to rates and contracts for mental health, substance use disorder, and other human service programs which includes a 2.9% CPI increase (July, 2024) and the difference between human services COLA's of the past three years (12.2%) and the CPI increases (17.1%) over that same period.

Carve behavioral health (mental health and substance use disorder) services out of the state's Medicaid managed care program and in doing so, restore the availability of essential services to some of our most vulnerable residents via reinvestment.

Support the following Executive Budget proposal specific to children and youth mental health: Youth Safe Spaces, \$1 million to create comprehensive clinical assessment hubs for complex

needs, teen Mental Health First Aid training, staffing for commercial insurance compliance, and \$2M wellness grants for marginalized communities.

Youth are more likely to access mental health programs in schools. Students need healing-centered schools.

Expand the use of Family and Youth Peer Advocates in school systems to help young people achieve their potential and protect their right to a free, appropriate public education. Peer Advocates can help families:

- Secure specialized support in schools through Individualized Education Plans or 504 plans,
- Provide mentorship and partner with schools to create safe spaces for students and parents to discuss their mental health challenges and support each other
- Help overcome challenges like truancy and suspensions.

Pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Act (S.134 / A.118) and add \$5M to support professional development of educators in order to reduce reliance on suspensions, restorative practices to replace punitive disciplinary measures and foster inclusive learning environments that address the root cause of school and student conflicts.

Grow community schools by dedicating \$100 million in categorical funding to support 500+ community schools statewide and \$5M to support local and state-level community school network building.

Move us closer to Universal Afterschool and summer programming by investing an additional \$180M for Learning Enrichment After-School Program Supports (LEAPS) grants.

Economic hardship undermines family wellbeing. Invest directly toward essential needs to improve the conditions where families raise their children.

Create the Child and Family Well-Being Fund of \$30M to establish a funding stream dedicated to community resources outside of the CPS system, driven by communities most impacted by poverty and child welfare, and promotes social fabric.

Enact in full the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC) recommendations which outline clear, evidence-based strategies to address housing, food security, and economic stability for families. Those recommendations include the following:

- Permanently expand eligibility and increase the value of the state child tax credit, with a focus on children in low-income families.
- Make additional housing assistance available, aligned with the housing market and existing voucher programs at 108% of the HUD Fair Market Rent level.
- Raise public assistance levels and reach more low-income New Yorkers with direct vital assistance.
- Establish a food benefit to help households in need not eligible for SNAP to feed their families.

Establish a Universal Free School Meals program that provides school breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students.

Move toward a high-quality, free, equitable, and universal child care system by establishing a permanent state child care fund to increase child care worker compensation (\$1.2B), developing a pay scale and career ladder plan, enhancing rates for children with special needs to 130%, and no longer tying child care subsidies to parents' exact work hours.

Establish the Baby Bucks Allowance Pilot Program (A1597/S2132) to provide monthly income to eligible participants for the last three months of pregnancy and the first 18 months of the child's life.

Young people are not their worst mistakes. New York must defend and advance youth justice.

Create a \$50 million Youth Justice Innovation Fund (A767 / S643) so that trusted, community-based organizations can apply directly to the state to provide a continuum of services from prevention, early intervention, to alternatives to detention, placement and incarceration for youth aged 12 through 25. This could fund all communities, including New York City. To date, only \$569 million of the total \$1.55 billion allocated for Raise the Age implementation has been spent.

Put Families First in Child Welfare

Adopt the broad use of Family Peer Advocates (FPAs) and Youth Peer Advocates (YPAs) in the Child Welfare system.

Improve the Child Welfare Housing Subsidy by increasing eligibility of former foster youth up to age 24 and index to inflation.

Expand access to timely and high quality parental legal representation statewide by adding \$50M to the Office of Indigent Legal Services budget.

Fully Fund the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI) at \$10M to support more foster youth attend and graduate from higher education through financial assistance for tuition, personal expenses, room & board, transportation and books.