



Testimony of FPWA

**Presented to:
New York City Council
Committee on Children and Youth
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Hon. Chair Althea V. Stevens
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We are grateful to the Council Committee on Children and Youth for holding this hearing, and to Chair Stevens for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of FPWA (Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies).

FPWA is an anti-poverty policy and advocacy organization committed to advancing economic opportunity, justice, and upward mobility for New Yorkers with low incomes. Since 1922, FPWA has driven groundbreaking policy reforms to better serve those in need. We work to dismantle the systemic barriers that impede economic security and well-being, and we strengthen the capacity of human services agencies and faith organizations so New Yorkers with lower incomes can thrive and live with dignity.

FPWA also has a membership network of more than 170 faith and community-based organizations. We support our members by offering workshops and trainings on topics such as leadership development, organizational management, and trauma-informed approaches to service delivery. FPWA also provides a range of financial assistance grants through our member network, working to strengthen individuals and families at the ground level. These grants provide direct support to New Yorkers in the form of scholarships, financial assistance for aging adults, funding for organizations providing HIV/AIDS related services, and more.

The City Council's Preliminary Budget Hearings for Fiscal Year 2025 come at a critical time for the city, as many New Yorkers are struggling just to make ends meet. A recent report released by FPWA in partnership with the University of Washington revealed a sobering picture of economic deprivation across New York City and State, finding that nearly two out of five households—or nearly 40% of New Yorkers—are struggling to afford just the basics, like paying rent, feeding their families, and affording child care.¹ In parts of New York City, that number is even higher. For example, in Queens County and Kings County, 49% of households are struggling to meet basic needs, and in the Bronx, a staggering 65% of households are struggling to meet basic needs.² This widespread economic deprivation is severely harming children and youth across our city, and this year's budget presents an opportunity to make critical investments in the services and supports that they need most.

At FPWA, we believe that all New York City children deserve access to quality, affordable child care and early education, so they can learn and grow in a safe and nurturing environment. We also believe that a child's race, family income, or immigration status should not determine the quality of their early and continual development. Children also deserve to have access to quality services outside of school, including youth development programming, afterschool, summer camp, and more. However, the FY25 Preliminary Budget includes devastating cuts to these vital services.

Given this context, FPWA urges the following investments to be included in the FY25 New York City Budget:

- Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)
 - Restore \$6.9 million for Comprehensive After School System of NYC (COMPASS NYC)
 - Restore \$19.6 million for the Summer Rising program
 - Invest \$16.45 to strengthen Runaway & Homeless Youth (RHY) services, including \$1.63 million for one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded drop-in centers; \$1.5

¹ https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NY_FPWA_BriefOne.pdf

² https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NY2023_FPWA_TechnicalBrief.pdf

million to maintain funding for housing specialists in the DYCD-RHY System; and \$5.6 million to fund an additional 100 DYCD RHY beds

- Restore \$5.4 million cut to the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) for FY25-FY27
- Administration for Children’s Services (ACS)
 - Support the child care workforce with a wage increase and benefits beyond compensation, such as increased access to affordable health care, child care, and housing assistance
 - Restore and baseline \$20 million to provide affordable, subsidized child care to undocumented families
 - Allocate additional funding for indigent defense in family court

These investments are particularly needed due to concerning, longer-term funding trends in New York City, as highlighted by our [NYC Funds Tracker](#). For example, the NYC Funds Tracker shows that city investment in ACS has fallen over the past 10 years. Between FY11 and FY23, ACS’ budget has decreased by over 17% in real terms, falling from \$3.60 billion to just \$2.98 billion. This continual divestment in human services agencies is particularly concerning given the impact that the uneven pandemic recovery has had on the city’s children and youth.

Essential Youth Services at Risk

Afterschool programs are critical not just for children but also for parents across New York City. However, the Preliminary Budget proposes a \$6.9 million cut to Comprehensive After School System of NYC (COMPASS NYC), which will result in the loss of 3,538 slots for youth, while the cuts to Summer Rising will also prevent youth from having field trips and a full 5 days of programming from 8am to 6pm. This will decrease the amount of citywide funding dedicated to afterschool programming overall, which will result in even less funding in DYCD’s forthcoming afterschool procurement. These cuts would devastate these programs, their workforce, and detrimentally impact access to care for children, youth, and families. We therefore urge the City Council to save afterschool and youth programs by restoring \$6.9 million for COMPASS afterschool and \$19.6 million for the Summer Rising program.

Supporting Youth Experiencing Homelessness and Strengthening Community Safety

DYCD funds critical services for Runaway & Homeless Youth that include drop-in centers, emergency shelter, crisis intervention, transitional housing, and street outreach to provide food, clothing, and other essentials. We cannot turn our back on youth who need these vital supports, so we urge the city to include an additional \$16.45 million in the FY25 budget, specifically:

- \$1.63 million for one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded drop-in center contracts
- \$5.6 million to fund 100 additional DYCD RHY beds (60 beds for 16–20-year-olds, 40 beds for 21–24-year-olds)
- \$5.5 million to “right-size” RHY Residential Contracts
- \$1.6 million to restore funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System
- \$625,000 to fund Youth-specific Immigration Legal Services

Through the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), DYCD funds Cure Violence and the Crisis Management System (CMS), which is a network of community-led organizations that, utilizing credible messengers, works to prevent violence in communities where rates of gun violence are high. There are currently 30 Cure Violence sites operating throughout the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Staten Island

and Queens. To support this work, we ask that the city restore November Plan PEG in the amount of \$5.471 million to the Office of Neighborhood Safety for FY25, FY26 and FY27.

In addition to restoring funding for youth services, we urge the city to address operational challenges that have undercut the ability of providers to sustain their programs and are ultimately reducing access to services for families. To address these challenges, we ask that the city invest in the following initiatives:

- Workforce:
 - Increase the cost-per-participant rates for COMPASS and SONYC to set a wage floor of no less than \$22/hour for staff and ensure year-round contracting.
- Enrollment and Access:
 - Prioritize consumer-centered outreach and enrollment, including by enabling CBOs providing youth services to directly enroll children and youth onsite, and by taking immediate action to stand up community-rooted application and enrollment facilitators that prioritize expediting access to youth services (afterschool and summer programming) in partnership with CBOs.
 - Establish year-round, 12-month youth services and shift to a K-8 summer program model.
- On Time and Full Payment:
 - Pay youth service providers on time and catch up on payments owed.
 - Fully staff DOE and DYCD divisions responsible for invoicing and payment and make permanent the ability of youth service providers to batch multiple months of invoices.
 - Release a new RFP for the SONYC and COMPASS contracts that covers the full and actual cost of care.

New York City Can Do More to Expand Access to Quality, Affordable Child Care

Access to quality, affordable child care is not only essential for the economic well-being of families in New York City, but it is also essential for the well-being of our economy and our city as a whole. We applaud the historic investment in child care made by the state last year, which helped expand access to assistance and provide some support for the child care workforce, and FPWA [continues to advocate for](#) the necessary investments in child care from the state. These investments include a permanent state child care fund to increase child care worker compensation, as well as expanding access to families who are currently prevented from accessing child care due to immigration status rules, enhancing access to non-traditional hour care, and preventing other access barriers.

But New York City also has a responsibility to invest in the child care sector. With more than 80% of families with children under 5 unable to afford child care in New York City, this is a crisis both for families and for our economy.³ In 2022 alone, the city is estimated to have lost \$23 billion in economic activity as a result of parents leaving the workforce or downshifting careers to meet child care needs.⁴

The focus of the fight for universal access to quality, affordable child care must be the workforce, without whom there is no path to making this a reality in New York City. Child care workers are almost entirely women and are disproportionately women of color and continue to be underpaid and

³ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cccnewyork.org/2023/10/CCC-From-Birth-to-Age-12-Child-Care-Affordability-and-Cost-Burden.pdf>

⁴ <https://fiveboro.nyc/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/InvestingInFamiliesAndOurFutureFinal.pdf>

undervalued despite the vital work they do each day. The average wage for child care workers in New York State is just \$35,190, one of the lowest among all professions.⁵ In fact, 98% of occupations in New York City pay more than child care.⁶ This is unacceptable. All members of the child care workforce should receive compensation parity with similar positions in the public school system. In addition to better wages, the city should provide benefits beyond compensation, such as increased access to affordable health care, child care, pension plans, housing stipends, and loan forgiveness.⁷

In addition, it is critical to ensure that families with children whose immigration status makes them ineligible for other federally-funded subsidized child care can have the same access as other families. “Promise NYC” was rolled out in December of 2022 to provide child care assistance to low-income families with children whose immigration status makes them ineligible for other federally-funded subsidized child care. ACS contracted with four community-based organizations to launch the program. Now, it is imperative that the city restore and baseline \$20 million to provide affordable, subsidized child care to undocumented families.

City Council Should Allocate Additional Funding for Indigent Defense in Family Court

The mission of ACS is to protect and promote the safety and well-being of New York City’s children, young people, families, and communities. The policies and practices of this agency concerning the child welfare or family regulation system have fallen short of these aims. ACS has failed to address the ways in which poverty is often conflated with abuse and neglect, and how structural racism impacts the enforcement of abuse and neglect in criminal and family law. Rather than guiding families into public benefits and services that may address food, clothing, or housing needs of children, ACS often takes a punitive approach.

This issue was highlighted in FPWA’s *End the Poverty to Prison Pipeline* report, which notes that investigations can lead to loss of child custody, termination of parental rights, criminal involvement, and barriers to reunification after reentry from prison.⁸ These negative outcomes leave lasting scars on children. In New York City, about 45% of Black and Latinx children experience an ACS investigation before the age of 18. These investigations are traumatic for children and families due to the invasiveness of investigations.⁹ The overly punitive approach has led Black families to be less frequently mandated to services in place of removal and children to experience longer spans in foster care.¹⁰ It is imperative that low-income families receive representation in family court, so we urge the City Council to increase funding for the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice to provide indigent defense for parents and guardians facing ACS investigation or possible removal of their children.

A report commissioned by ACS detailed the heightened surveillance and scrutiny faced by Black and Brown New Yorkers and the practices of ACS caseworkers pushing their way into homes without

⁵ <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes399011.htm>

⁶ <https://www.dccnyinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Enduring-Value-of-the-Early-Childhood-Workforce-9-2023-2.pdf>

⁷ <https://fiveboro.nyc/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/InvestingInFamiliesAndOurFutureFinal.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FPWAs-Ending-the-Poverty-to-Prison-Pipeline-Report-2019-FINAL.pdf>

⁹ <https://familypolicynyc.org/report/scr/>

¹⁰ <https://www.centernyc.org/urban-matters-2/from-surveillance-and-control-to-family-assistance-and-support>

informing parents and guardians of their rights.¹¹ A class action filed against ACS last month details claims of the same coercive practices of caseworkers showing up at homes without court order and issuing threats of family separation to goad consent to enter.¹² These reports are extremely troubling. We call upon the City Council to pass Int 0096-2024,¹³ which would require ACS to provide a multilanguage disclosure form to families before entering homes, and to reintroduce Int 0865-2022¹⁴ this session to require ACS to verbally inform parents and guardians of their rights before conducting a search.¹⁵

Thank you for your time and your attention to these critical issues. FPWA looks forward to working with you to make meaningful investments in the economic security of New Yorkers in the FY25 budget. To do so, it is critical that the budget focuses on improving access to child care and youth services and prioritizing family and child well-being across all agencies. Rather than cutting critical programs and the agencies that administer them, the city should invest in improving these programs, which are essential to promoting economic security and protecting the dignity of all New Yorkers.

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/22/nyregion/nyc-acs-racism-abuse-neglect.html>

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/20/nyregion/acs-nyc-family-trauma-lawsuit.html>

¹³ <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6509497&GUID=898BF0D0-CE4C-42DA-826B-AD96FBE07E4F&Options=Advanced&Search=>

¹⁴ <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5971641&GUID=4B08872F-0D7C-4294-BDFA-A35682C6CCE9&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=child+protective+services>

¹⁵ <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5971641&GUID=4B08872F-0D7C-4294-BDFA-A35682C6CCE9&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=child+protective+services>