

# From Barriers to Opportunity: Confronting Systemic Barriers to Early Childhood and Poverty-Reduction Programs

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## INTRODUCTION

Families across New York State rely on an array of public programs and resources to support their children during their critical early years. But availability does not equal access. Today, far too many New York families do not benefit from local, state, and federal support they need to raise healthy and thriving children due to systemic barriers standing in their way. These hurdles are especially steep for people of color, immigrants, and other historically marginalized groups. It is part of the reason why New York has a **high rate of child poverty**, with nearly one in five kids experiencing poverty, and nearly one in four Black and Latinx children.

To remove barriers to access, we must first identify them. EdTrust-New York is uniquely positioned to do so. We are a statewide education policy and advocacy organization focused first and foremost on doing right by New York's children. We advocate for students, especially those whose needs and potential are often overlooked. We serve as a convener of diverse statewide coalitions, including **Raising New York**, focusing on equity issues from birth to college and through the workforce.

Raising New York is a cross-sector, statewide coalition of parent, early childhood, education, civil rights, business, and health organizations dedicated to advocating for policies and system changes that will benefit families of infants and toddlers. Raising New York works to improve long-term outcomes for low-income households, children of color, and other historically marginalized groups.

Over the past year, we worked with partners<sup>1</sup> across the State to pinpoint the most common barriers keeping families from accessing high-quality child care and other public benefits, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Our coalition partners leveraged their deep ties in local communities to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research, fielding numerous surveys, collecting and analyzing original data, and recording hundreds of interviews. Based on the barriers we identified, we then developed recommendations to eradicate them. As a result, our findings and recommendations are rooted in the lived experiences of families and give parents and caregivers a voice in improving the programs that directly impact *their* lives.

**“OUR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARE ROOTED IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FAMILIES AND GIVE PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS A VOICE IN IMPROVING THE PROGRAMS THAT DIRECTLY IMPACT *THEIR* LIVES.”**

<sup>1</sup> Key partners that gathered research and data for this report include Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance, Help Me Grow-Long Island, New York Immigration Coalition, ECE on the Move, the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, and The Children's Agenda.

## METHODOLOGY

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To gain insight into the most common barriers keeping families from accessing public benefits, EdTrust-New York and partners from Raising New York collected quantitative and qualitative data between September 2023 and June 2024. These data illustrate the nuanced challenges families experience seeking out and applying for public benefits and child care. The qualitative data provide narrative detail that shows how difficult it is for New Yorkers to successfully navigate the complex and confusing systems meant to address their young families' basic needs. It also uplifts parent and caregiver voices that should inform how New York can expand access to public benefit programs specifically for families of color, families from low-income backgrounds, immigrant families, and other historically marginalized families.

Our partners collected information from more than 1,000 families across New York State. We surveyed parents, child care providers, early childhood educators, and other primary caregivers across rural, urban, and suburban communities, including Essex, St. Lawrence, Monroe, Nassau and Suffolk counties, Rochester, Schenectady, and New York City.

We also utilized a variety of data collection methods to track families' experiences navigating a range of public benefit programs. Over the data collection period, our partners hosted community town halls; conducted one-on-one surveys of parents and caregivers in public libraries, pediatric medical offices, and subway stations; held focus groups; analyzed data from case management systems; and utilized messaging platforms to engage child care providers/educators.

Our partners encountered many challenges collecting data for this report. Without a closed-loop referral system, it is hard to track if families eventually receive the benefits and services to which they were referred. To do so requires staff-intensive follow-up with families over several months. Many public benefit programs already face staff shortages and long waiting lists, making this type of data collection impossible to do regularly. The data we share in this report, therefore, helps illuminate families' experiences in a way our benefits and care systems are not currently designed to.

## OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN IN NEW YORK

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New York State faces an urgent challenge — poverty and inequality continue to put too many young children and families at risk, particularly families of color, immigrants, and other historically marginalized groups. Access to essential services like child care, food security programs, and early childhood development support is critical for supporting families and breaking the cycle of poverty. In this report, we explore access to child care subsidies, food and nutritional benefits, and home visiting. Along with Medicaid and Early Intervention, these programs make up the bulk of New York's public assistance to families with young children.

In 2022, New York spent more than \$900 million on two public benefit programs that are critical for families with young children — child care assistance and home visiting.<sup>2</sup> The State spent an additional \$9 billion on nutrition support through SNAP and WIC.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> New York State Office of Children and Family Services, July 2024; United States Census Bureau, 2023

<sup>3</sup> Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022; New York State Office of Budget Policy and Analysis, March 2023

## EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

	CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE	HOME VISITING
<b>WHAT IS THE PROGRAM</b>	<p>New York’s Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) helps families from low- and moderate-income backgrounds afford the cost of child care. Eligible families may use CCAP funds for child care only during their hours of work, school, or their participation in a qualified job training or rehabilitation program.</p> <p>Eligible families can enroll their child in any enrolled child care program that accepts CCAP. Depending on income level, some or all of the cost of the program is paid directly by CCAP.</p>	<p>Voluntary home visiting programs deliver services and support to families from early pregnancy through the first few years of a child’s life. Families are paired with a trained home visitor, nurse, or paraprofessional who provides education and support, gathers information to tailor services, and refers to additional services if necessary.</p>
<b>WHY IT IS IMPORTANT</b>	<p>Parents continue to face significant challenges in securing and affording child care. Access to child care enables parents to stay employed or pursue education. This helps families achieve financial stability while ensuring children receive care and early learning opportunities essential for their development.</p>	<p>Home visiting programs have proven to decrease child abuse and neglect, increase school readiness, and improve child and maternal health outcomes. They can also play an important role in connecting families to additional public benefit programs such as medical and mental health services, food, housing, community resources, and child care.</p>
<b>WHO IS ELIGIBLE</b>	<p>Families with children from six weeks to 12 years old who meet income and work participation requirements. New York State has expanded eligibility up to 85% of the state median income.</p> <p>An estimated 83,400 families who are already eligible for Medicaid, SNAP, WIC, and other programs are now income-eligible for CCAP but must also meet work participation requirements.</p>	<p>In general expectant parents and families with children under age five. Home visiting is an umbrella term for a variety of different program models, each of which has its own eligibility criteria.</p> <p>Most programs target resources for families from low-income backgrounds, pregnant people and new parents, and families facing additional challenges such as mental health issues, domestic violence, or substance abuse.</p>
<b>WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF FUNDING</b>	Federal, State, and Local	Federal, State, and Local

## PUBLIC BENEFITS

	SNAP	WIC
<b>WHAT IS THE BENEFIT</b>	<p>The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the United States’ largest anti-poverty program for children. SNAP funds are only eligible for use toward “staple” food purchases (excluding prepared foods) and cannot be used to purchase household supplies or hygienic items.</p> <p>Eligible families receive a monthly benefit determined by income level, household expenses, and household size.</p>	<p>The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a food and nutrition support program targeted at the unique needs of families during pregnancy and the earliest years of a child’s life.</p> <p>Eligible families may receive nutrition assistance, nutrition counseling and classes, health care referrals, and breastfeeding support.</p>
<b>WHY IT IS IMPORTANT</b>	<p>The first years of a child’s life are critical, and access to high-quality food during this period is essential. Food insufficiency disproportionately affects Black (17.5%) and Latinx (17%) New Yorkers at more than twice the rate of White (7.1%) New Yorkers.<sup>4</sup></p>	<p>The nutritional support provided by WIC ensures that pregnant people, nursing parents, and young children receive essential nutrition that promotes healthy growth and development. Studies show that families that receive WIC support have higher infant birth weights, fewer preterm births, and lower infant mortality.<sup>5</sup></p>
<b>WHO IS ELIGIBLE</b>	<p>Households with a gross income that is at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level and a net income at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.</p> <p>Eligible households must meet some work requirements, although there are exceptions for households where someone is the primary caregiver for a young child.</p>	<p>Families must have a gross income at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level.</p> <p>Families must include a person who meets one of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pregnant person</li> <li>• Postpartum person</li> <li>• Breastfeeding person</li> <li>• Infant</li> <li>• Child up to age five</li> </ul>
<b>WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF FUNDING</b>	Federal and State	Federal and State

<sup>4</sup> Hunger and Health — The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Improving Health and Well-Being - Food Research & Action Center (frac.org)

<sup>5</sup> Maternal, Infant, and Child Health Outcomes Associated With the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children: A Systematic Review: Annals of Internal Medicine: Vol 175, No 10 (acpjournals.org)

## WHAT WE FOUND

### **Child Care**

The challenges with affordability and availability of child care in New York have created a crisis. More than 60 percent of the State is considered a child care desert, meaning that there are three or more children under the age of five waiting for every one available child care seat.

Even outside of deserts, seats for infants and toddlers are hard to find. The youngest children require specialized care and supervision from trained caregivers. In addition, important regulations that help keep infants and toddlers safe — including higher staff-to-child ratio requirements and higher health and safety standards — drive up the cost of care for the youngest children. This can make it cost-prohibitive for providers/educators to continue to offer infant and toddler seats.

Recent changes to the State’s Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) have resulted in significant increases in the number of families who are now using this benefit. Since the changes went into effect in June 2023, more than 125,000 children are receiving subsidized care this year. This represents a 31 percent increase over the course of the year.<sup>6</sup> Yet only about 10 percent of all eligible families use this benefit,<sup>7</sup> in part due to longstanding income and work restrictions. Currently, families are only eligible for assistance during their hours of work, which is particularly challenging for parents who hold second jobs, work in the gig economy, or work evening shifts as CCAP will not cover care while a parent who works an overnight shift sleeps during the day. As one North Country parent in a Schuyler Center community meeting put it:

**“THE CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM HAS BEEN GREAT SINCE THEY UPPED THE INCOME LEVEL. BUT CHILD CARE IS A NECESSITY, AND THERE SHOULDN’T BE LIMITS ON ASSISTANCE.”**

Moreover, applying for child care subsidies is an overly complex, bureaucratic, and time-consuming process, keeping many families from trying altogether. Many parents are unaware that these programs exist in the first place, or that they are eligible for such programs. New York State recently launched an online application for the CCAP, which is an important step toward streamlining this process for families. Yet parents who do complete the application still report difficulty in locating an available seat for their child. The Children’s Agenda’s survey of caretakers in Monroe County found that many families would benefit from additional support to locate a child care provider willing to accept the CCAP payment. Families who attended the Schuyler Center’s focus groups across the State reported that navigating the complex and time-consuming system of applying for CCAP was just the first step in an ongoing struggle to find and maintain child care.

Families who exceed the income threshold for CCAP also struggle to find child care, as the cost of unsubsidized care is prohibitively expensive. One parent surveyed by the Schuyler Center said, “I had to become a stay-at-home

<sup>6</sup> NYCCAP-Family-Child-Counts-2024Jun.pdf

<sup>7</sup> United States Census Bureau, July 2024

parent and babysit because I couldn't find child care for my kids to continue working. [I] needed assistance to help pay for child care ... my paycheck would just be going to child care."

For child care providers/educators, the prevalence of poverty-level wages has led to rampant financial insecurity in the sector, and educators—particularly women of color—are leaving the field in droves. Between 2019 and 2024, rural Essex County lost 40 percent of its child care seats. Today, the county has only 42 child care providers/educators for roughly 1,125 infants and toddlers. Faced with rising costs and the end of COVID-19 aid and workforce

retention grants, providers/educators are struggling to keep the lights on and are increasingly forced to charge families higher rates to cover costs.

Child care providers/educators, particularly those in home-based settings, also face various bureaucratic hurdles and system delays. Insufficient rates, as well as approval and payment delays, place a heavy burden on providers/educators. Many providers/educators have strong, personal relationships with the families they serve and sometimes provide care without reimbursement for months at a time. While ECE on the Move has worked with city agencies to improve delayed payments, home-based child care providers/educators served by ECE on the Move reported waiting nearly two years for reimbursement for providing care to children with special needs and regularly waiting more than five months for reimbursement. As one provider shared at the end of May 2024, "I have not been paid for three brothers since January." ECE On the Move, along with fellow advocates, continues to work closely with City agencies to resolve specific cases and address long-term challenges.

Together, these roadblocks have a real impact on parents' lives and their ability to raise a family. For example, the New York Immigration Coalition surveyed 75 newcomers in New York City focused specifically on parents who sell candy and fruit in the subways, with children in tow. They found that 42 percent of respondents said that one of the biggest obstacles for them is access to child care. A staggering 83 percent said they had aspirations to pursue other lines of work but had not been able to due to trouble finding child care.

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## Public Benefits

With New York State's high cost of living, a significant number of families turn to public assistance programs to help afford food, housing, and healthcare. This includes 2.8 million New York residents on SNAP and 430,000 participants in the WIC program. These critical programs, however, come with their own limitations. Our research found that challenges accessing SNAP and WIC, in particular, were pervasive. For example, out of the 1,730 basic needs referral tracked by by Help Me Grow-Long Island, nearly two-thirds (62%) were about diapers. But among those families who called about diapers and were then encouraged to enroll in SNAP benefits, over half declined a referral for SNAP. Many families shared that overly restrictive program guidelines: for example, neither SNAP nor WIC covers the cost of diapers, despite diapers routinely being the single most requested item by parents. Additionally, SNAP is not available to many immigrant families, it is limited to those with certain immigration visas.

Interviewees across New York shared how the cumbersome burden of applying for resources outweighs the perceived benefits, especially when considering other factors such as time constraints, lack of information, and the immediacy of their needs. The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance, for example, heard from parents and caregivers that the application process is time-consuming and often frustrating for a family to commit to hours away from work on the phone, computer, or in-person at an office only to be denied for incomplete applications.

Families who tried to apply for SNAP and WIC also found that many local food agencies did not have enough Spanish-speakers on staff to meet demand, and they frequently faced overloaded caseloads and limited capacity due to staffing shortages. Help Me Grow-Long

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Island, for example, would strategically rotate referrals of Spanish-speaking families across different SNAP providers to not overwhelm the agencies.

Others detailed how benefit amounts were insufficient, especially given the sharp rise in food and grocery costs in recent years. In Rochester, The Children's Agenda found that even when families successfully applied for WIC, there are communities with little to no WIC vendors, preventing families from easily using their benefits in their own



neighborhoods. During one of the Schuyler Center’s community conversations, a Schenectady resident shared:

**“MORE THAN ONCE, I HAD TO LEAVE GROCERIES BEHIND WITH THE CASHIER BECAUSE WE DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH TO PAY, [OR LEFT] HALF-FULL CARTS IN A STORE BECAUSE THE GROGER DID NOT HAVE THE SPECIFIED PRODUCT REQUIRED BY WIC.”**

### **Barriers Across Programs**

Many of the challenges described above are the result of inherent program shortcomings — meaning they can be addressed through better, more equitable program design and service delivery. Across early childhood and public benefit programs, we found striking similarities in terms of the barriers that were most pernicious in limiting parents’ access to resources. These barriers can be summarized as follows:

#### Lack of information

Families are simply unaware that these programs exist and that they may be eligible for benefits; often, little outreach is done to educate communities that need assistance the most. Parents and caregivers surveyed for this report described word-of-mouth information-sharing and personal connections as key to determining whether they knew of a program’s existence. For example, 93 percent of immigrant and recently arrived

parents and caregivers surveyed by the New York Immigration Coalition’s **Algún Día** project had not received assistance with basic needs like health insurance or school enrollment for their children, been contacted by state or city agencies, or connected with local community-based organizations.

#### Difficulty applying for and securing benefits

- Tedious and time-consuming applications with extensive paperwork and intrusive follow-up, which often requires technological literacy and internet access. As a participant in the Schuyler Center’s community meeting in Schenectady shared, “Filing for benefits is quite a task to gather all the information. People feel lost and hopeless. And the amount [of assistance] is not enough to cover needs.”
- Inadequate staffing and lack of trauma-informed human support to guide families through the application process and assuage concerns over privacy often make parents hesitant to apply. For example, the Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance found that parents and caregivers in Essex County reported they frequently hit “dead ends” when trying to access services, felt frustration at having to retell their story, and felt it often fell to them to be the connective tissue between services. As one parent told ECE on the Move, “I can’t get a person directly on the phone human resources referred me to the technical difficulties number which was 311 and 311 directs me to human resources who said they no longer can help me due to me filing a fair hearing and instructed me to wait to hear from them. If I wait then I am going to lose my daughter’s spot at her daycare we love. I need a live person to help me with my case I don’t want to lose my job.”

❖ Language barriers, difficulty accessing a computer and the internet, transportation issues and proximity to services, and other administrative hurdles such as slow processing times and poor, unreliable communication. For example, families who received support through the Baby Steps to Bright Futures Program analyzed by the Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance found transportation a challenge for themselves and service providers as it can take families living in the remote rural areas of Essex County an hour or more to reach a population center where most offices and services are located.

#### Program-specific limitations

❖ Significant eligibility restrictions and qualification requirements, such as home visits and refiling requirements, as well as certain work stipulations, such as employment of 20 hours per week to be eligible for SNAP. For example, Help Me Grow-Long Island reported families feel that the requirements of the [WIC] program outweigh the effort for families to remain enrolled given the families' perceived benefit of the program. In regard to child care barriers, one parent told ECE on the Move, "I had applied for recertification for my [son's child care] and I submitted all the

paperwork and they said I didn't submit anything. I just want to get the voucher back I can't afford to pay for child care out my pocket."

❖ Inadequate benefit levels, narrow list of items covered, and a lack of available service windows outside of traditional work hours, e.g. when food pantries or child care centers are open. As one participant in the Schuyler Center's Schenectady community meeting shared, "the 'cliff' is one of the biggest factors that perpetuates food insecurity and other poverty-related issues. [A raise of] 25 cents an hour ends up costing more than the raise you got [due to lost benefits], and then you cannot make it anymore on partial assistance and then end up back on full assistance."

❖ Immigration status limits access to many programs, including many federal benefits, child care, and direct-to-family credits. According to information collected by the New York Immigration Coalition, nearly all of the asylum seeker children who have come to New York City over the last two years are ineligible for many benefits as families only become eligible as a qualified immigrant once their asylum claims have been adjudicated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure that families who need help can access it, New York State should make the following changes to child care and other public benefit programs:

- 1 Broaden and deepen outreach to parents** via targeted, creative strategies and multilingual navigators capable of reaching eligible populations and educating them about programs and benefits.
  - Increase transportation and child care assistance for in-person applicants and expand program offices and hours of operation to more neighborhoods to help people complete applications.
- 2 Streamline and improve the application (and recertification) process across programs**, allowing families to apply to multiple programs and services online, all in one place.<sup>8</sup>
  - Eliminate language barriers, remove unnecessary paperwork requirements, and ensure applications are user-friendly and easy to navigate.
- 3 Increase workforce and program capacity**, including more frequent in-person human touch points, technology upgrades, timely communication, and culturally-appropriate and trauma-informed training for staff.
  - Make significant investments in the human services workforce to ease overburdened caseloads, shorten waitlists and wait times, and raise wages to recruit and retain qualified staff.

- 4** Where possible under federal guidelines, **eliminate unnecessary limits and restrictions** on access to public benefits, including certain work requirements, and **increase benefit levels** for families.

A six-year-long project by the New York Immigration Coalition found that

**4 OUT OF 5**

immigrant families said they would *not have been able* to apply or enroll in early childhood education without direct, in-person assistance.



<sup>8</sup> New York State's Integrated Eligibility System, currently in development, proposes meaningful steps in this direction.

## CONCLUSION

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New York State has set an **ambitious goal** of cutting child poverty in half over the next decade. Doing so will depend on our ability to get public benefit programs, services, and resources into the hands of families — especially people of color, immigrants, and other historically marginalized groups — who need help the most.

Yet our State's current system of support often falls short. Families feel like they are constantly hitting dead ends; that is, if they know about available resources to begin with. A litany of obstacles — from dizzying and time-intensive applications to understaffed agencies and arbitrary program restrictions — keep critical support out of reach for thousands. It has left parents frustrated, child care providers/educators underpaid, and programs overwhelmed.

With common-sense changes and smart investments, however, New York can ensure that its public benefit programs are truly accessible and basic needs are met. Doing so will help prevent hunger and hardship throughout the State.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We are grateful to the Pritzker Children's Initiative, Robin Hood Foundation, Klingenstein Philanthropies, and Altman Foundation for their generous funding and support, without which this project would not have been possible.

## APPENDIX

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We are grateful to the following partners from Raising New York who contributed to this report.

### **The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance**

The Adirondack Foundation established the Birth to Three Alliance (BT3) in 2014 with a clear vision: To fulfill every child's promise to become a healthy, thriving, contributing member of their communities. There are 5,000 children aged zero to three living in Clinton, Essex, and Franklin counties and the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation. BT3 has connected a network of public and private sources that provide early care, physical health, social-emotional development, family support, and education, making it easier for providers and parents to find needed resources. BT3 provides a needed forum for organizations and individuals committed to this work to share best practices, identify funding opportunities, and discuss common challenges. At the same time, relationships across the region help the organization identify gaps, bridge services, and leverage community resources.

For this report, BT3 worked with the Essex County Health Department's Baby Steps to Bright Futures Program, a home visiting pilot initiative, to collect data on the 166 families in the county who had a child between September 1, 2023, and June 3, 2024. The Baby Steps to Bright Futures Program contacted every family and tracked information via the program's case management software, Plan Street. Additional information describing the experiences and challenges of the region's parents and caregivers was tracked by Family Peer Advocates and program coordinators from conversations with families and input sessions with BT3's parent advisory council. Over the course of collecting data for this report, BT3 also partnered with

VIVA Social Impact partners to develop an early childhood communications campaign and increase public awareness of available programs and resources.

### **Help Me Grow-Long Island/Docs for Tots**

Help Me Grow Long Island (HMGLI) is a partnership coordinated by Docs for Tots based on an evidence-based national model (Help Me Grow-HMG) to promote the healthy development of infants and toddlers by providing comprehensive support to pregnant people, new parents, and their families. HMGLI is available for all families that have a child under age five in Nassau or Suffolk counties, but outreach efforts are focused on communities most likely to benefit from services, namely lower-income communities, families of color, and Spanish-speaking families, who often include recent immigrants. Most (81%) HMGLI families have a child under three years of age or are expecting, and almost two-thirds of the families served are Spanish-speaking, compared to just 13% of Long Islanders. Additionally, the majority of families (94%) are enrolled in Medicaid.

HMGLI collected data on 478 families with 584 children who requested support obtaining diapers between September 2023 and June 2024. Requests for assistance for any type of basic needs represented 60% of the total requests for support during that time period, and diapers are often a frequent need that provides an opportunity to establish deeper family engagement between HMGLI staff and families, opening the door to identification of additional needs, including SNAP and WIC. HMGLI staff discuss nutritional support programs, in part to help offset the cost of diapers and other costs not covered under SNAP and WIC.

### **ECE On the Move**

In New York City, ECE On the Move (ECEOTM) is an advocacy group of over 600 family child care providers/educators in residential settings who, in addition to caring for children, often provide support and guidance to parents who are seeking child care subsidies. ECEOTM recognizes the interconnected challenges faced by both parents and providers/educators, and as such, they are committed to supporting parents as they navigate the complex landscape of child care assistance and programming.

From September 2023 to June 2024, ECEOTM compiled documentation from parents and providers/educators who reported confusion applying for child care vouchers, had questions about recertification requirements, and noted long waits for processing and approvals. ECEOTM also shared qualitative information from their regular interviews with members. These interviews show that providers/educators are not earning enough to cover their operational costs. This financial strain is leading many providers/educators to charge higher fees, a shift that can price out parents and families.

### **New York Immigration Coalition**

The largest and oldest statewide immigrant coalition in the United States, the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), is a convener and coordinator of efforts to support immigrants across New York. With member organizations located in every borough in New York City and across the State, collectively serving communities that speak more than 65 languages, the NYIC has a long history and track record of coordinating collaborative efforts with members and key allies to reach target populations and respond

to issues. As part of a new project in New York City, NYIC funded the **Algún Día** project, a survey of parents who are recently-arrived immigrants who sell candy and fruit with their children in subways, parks, and bus stations.

For this report, social workers canvassed public transportation between March to June 2024 to learn more about any formal assistance parents received since arriving in New York City and what resources would be helpful. Families were very cautious. Seventy-five parents agreed to speak to outreach specialists for NYC's **Algún Día Report** in large part because they were of similar background, spoke the same language, came prepared with translated resources to share, and did not ask for identifying information for any reason except to contact them for additional resourcing. Not every family answered every question, and for the most part, families directed the conversation to their needs. Social workers collected a combination of descriptive data including age, number of children, country of origin, and current housing setting, in addition to qualitative data on current needs, fears, and aspirations for future employment.

### **Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy**

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (Schuyler Center) is a statewide, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to independent policy analysis and advocacy to ensure that public systems focus on people in need.

Over the past year, Schuyler Center worked with community-based partners to host community gatherings to hear from parents, families, and community members about the barriers they face navigating poverty and social service programs. The three meetings were:

- August 2023 in Rochester, co-hosted by The Children’s Agenda and the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative
- May 2024 in Schenectady, co-hosted by the Alliance for a Hunger Free New York, the Rotterdam Community Center, and the Labor-Religion Coalition
- June 2024 in Massena, co-hosted by the Labor Religion Coalition, the Poor People’s Campaign, the People’s Project and the Community Schools program of the Massena School District

**The Children’s Agenda**

The Children’s Agenda (TCA) advocates for effective policies and drives evidenced-based solutions for the health, education, and success of children. The organization is especially committed to children who are vulnerable because of poverty, racism, health inequities, and trauma.

TCA surveyed parents about their experiences navigating four programs targeted at

supporting families from low-income backgrounds, especially during a child’s earliest years. The goals of this survey were to better understand how families with young children experience the enrollment and recertification processes for our priority benefits programs, as well as to gather feedback on how impacted populations would like to see these processes improved. TCA also spoke with policy experts, reviewed changes to those programs that were put in place during or after the pandemic and analyzed publicly available program participation data.

In addition to contributing to this report, TCA and Raising NY released a **Monroe County-specific** report that demonstrates that New York State, aided by increased federal flexibility due to the pandemic, has made significant strides to reduce administrative burdens on families. It also reveals that there are several additional program improvements necessary to ease access to critical supports for families from low-income backgrounds with young children.

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# **RAiSiNG NEW YORK**

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