



**Citizens' Committee
for Children** of NEW YORK

**Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to the New York State FY 2027 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Public Protection
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For 80 years, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) has been an independent voice for children advancing child and family well-being through research, advocacy, and civic engagement. With deep expertise in data, policy and child-serving systems, CCC champions proven solutions and mobilizes allies to secure reforms that improve child outcomes and promote equity. CCC drives systems change to ensure every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, and all the committee members for holding today's hearing on Public Protection in the FY27 Executive Budget.

Invest in Prevention and Support Justice-Involved Youth

New York State's youth crime rates have consistently declined since the Raise the Age (RTA) law was first implemented in 2018. Evidence from across the State shows how the law has improved community safety and youth well-being.ⁱ Raise the Age was intended not only to treat justice-involved youth in humane and developmentally appropriate ways, but also to provide counties with the resources needed to prevent involvement and re-involvement of youth in the criminal justice system. These resources were meant to include behavioral health, substance use treatment supports, mentoring, alternatives to detention and incarceration, and other vital support services.

Despite the intentions of RTA, New York State has failed to fully deliver on the promise to fund community-based services and programs. In fact, from 2019-2023, only a third of the money appropriated for youth justice under Raise the Age has been spent. Based on a review of spending in the top 10 counties (outside of NYC) less than 20% of funds approved - sometimes as little as 10% - were for community-based services and programs. New York City, despite representing about half of the youth justice system in the State, has never received these dollars.

The State's failure to ensure RTA funds reach the communities it was intended to has deprived communities of the resources they need to enhance services, support youth, and prevent youth involvement in the justice system. **We therefore join partners across the state in urging state leaders to allocate \$50 million for a Youth Justice Innovation Fund to directly fund community-based organizations that provide a continuum of critical youth services, including prevention, early intervention, and alternatives to detention, placement, and incarceration for youth aged 12 through 25.**

The Innovation Fund would take \$50 million of the annual \$250 million appropriation for Raise the Age and dedicate it to directly funding community based organizations providing services ranging from



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mentoring and school support, to employment and internships, to mental health, counseling and other age-appropriate programs shown to reduce contact with the criminal justice system and future court-involvement. The Innovation Fund builds on successful state-wide efforts like [Project RISE](#), which has brought over \$30 million to communities to combat gun violence through public health strategies, including credible messenger and violence interruption programs. **The fund would help to build up these critical community resources that bolster neighborhood safety and support positive youth development.**

CCC also recommends the following steps to ensure RTA funds are being sent where they are most needed:

- **Expedite** counties' access to the already appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars for the Raise the Age law's implementation.
- **Ensure** New York City can access the RTA funding. NYC represents about half of the youth in the state, but statutory language excludes the city from receiving state support. Every county and all New York youth should benefit from state funding under RTA, no matter where they live.

Raise the Age has proven successful, and the law reflects the reality that developmentally appropriate treatment for young people makes communities safer and stronger. Governor Hochul rightly declined to propose changes to Raise the Age in her budget, as the evidence does not support rolling back these reforms. This session, the state must prioritize funding a robust array of services and supports to ensure the law's full and effective implementation. Albany lawmakers must include the Youth Justice Innovation Fund in this year's budget to expand pathways for community-based organizations that are successfully serving young people. Calls to prosecute more children as adults must be categorically and swiftly rejected.

State leaders should also support legislation aimed at supporting students, protecting children, and expanding protection for young adults:

- **Pass the Youth Justice and Opportunity Act (A.4238/S.3426):** This legislation adds protections for youth up to the age of 26 and creates a new status to classify this age group under. This will allow youth to have their records sealed and enable them to access more supportive services.
- **Pass the Youth Interrogation Bill (A.620/S.878):** This legislation will ensure that young people under 18 have their legal guardians notified prior to being questioned by the police.
- **Pass Solutions Not Suspensions (A.118/S.134):** This legislation will improve the school climate and limit the number of days a student can be suspended to a maximum of 20 days.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/juvenilearrests/index.htm>