



Prevent Child Abuse New York™

**Testimony at the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Health
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Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am Jenn O'Connor, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Prevent Child Abuse New York.

Prevent Child Abuse New York (PCANY) is a nonprofit organization that believes child abuse and neglect prevention occurs in communities--by strengthening families. We provide three primary services at the state and local level; **community awareness, training, and technical assistance**, and **policy and advocacy**.

Our **community awareness and education** efforts are aimed at increasing knowledge about the Five Protective Factors as a form of prevention. It is our belief that individuals can use the Five Protective Factors to help prevent child maltreatment. Specific programs include the Parent Helpline and the Pinwheels for Prevention Campaign. The Helpline is multilingual and provides free and confidential support for parents and caregivers. The Pinwheels for Prevention Campaign raises awareness about helping children thrive. These examples embody the Protective Factors framework by providing concrete support in times of need and educational opportunities. Collective community understanding about how to foster resilient New York families is a proven form of prevention.

Our **training and technical assistance** provide professionals and communities with the knowledge, tools, and resources to make great environments for families and children. We provide Healthy Families New York Home Visiting Certification and run the New York State Parenting Education Partnership, a program that provides support and resources for parents. The Enough Abuse Sexual Abuse Prevention, Community-based Strengthening Families, and Child Abuse Prevention courses offer multi-faceted educational opportunities. In addition, we provide direct staff consulting and mini-grants to organizations that are implementing prevention strategies.

Finally, our **policy and advocacy** efforts drive initiatives at the Statewide and local level to change systems that impact child maltreatment issues. We advocate for evidence-based policy solutions that target root causes of child maltreatment, such as increases in early childhood home visiting, early care and education system

development, reduction of unplanned pregnancies, and family stability/economic issues.

All of our work centers around the belief that child abuse occurs because families are under stress and not supported. Multi-generational trauma exists due to poverty, violence, and substance abuse (among other factors). PCANY focuses great attention on decreasing and addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) while increasing Protective Factors and Resilience. All of our budget asks would serve to strengthen families and the communities they live in. During this time of isolation, economic hardship, and racial tension, families need proven services and supports more than ever; we urge you to restore funding, maintain funding, and even invest in the following areas.

BUDGET ASKS

Maternal Mental Health

According to the NYS Office of Mental Health, between 15 and 20 percent of all women experience some form of pregnancy-related depression --prenatal, postpartum, and postpartum psychosis. While these experiences are incredibly common, and the narrative is most often "You are not alone," inequities exist in the availability of mental health services for women. Black women are less likely to receive treatment and they are also less likely to seek treatment due to ingrained stigma. Maternal depression can deeply impact a child's development by interfering with their brain architecture. Persistent disruptions of stress response systems can also impact a child's long-term physical health (Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2009). ACEs science tells us that chronic, toxic stress at a young age is correlated with public health issues-- mental health disorders, substance abuse, obesity, and incarceration.

Maternal Mortality

Governor Cuomo's Taskforce on Maternal Mortality and Disparate Racial Outcomes has highlighted the racial and ethnic disparities in maternal mortality. According to Raising New York, the maternal mortality rate in NYS for Black women is 3X higher than for white women (2020).

Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting

Voluntary home visiting programs decrease abuse, improve maternal and child health outcomes, and increase school readiness. Home visitors are a concrete source of support because they provide education, referral to community services, and information about child development. These programs have had an impact on the opioid crisis by providing support to addicted mothers and babies. Home visiting is a proven prevention strategy. Program models engage mothers in the role of parenting and strengthen protective factors. Home visiting also positively impacts maternal mental health. It has been demonstrated to reduce rates of maternal depression and maternal morbidity. A universally offered, coordinated system of home visiting would improve

identification of need, delivery of services, and referral to supports, especially for historically underserved families.

Prior to the pandemic, NYS was only serving 3% of all children aged 0-3 and 6% of babies in low-income families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced programs to pivot, providing virtual visits as well as concrete supports such as food and diapers to families. According to an April 2020 survey by Raising New York, more than one-third of parents with infants and toddlers in NYS have skipped or cut back on meals and more than half feel uneasy about personal finances (Raising New York, 2020). These stressors contribute to chronic stress for the families of New York State. Coupled with a lack of parental buffering, the young children of these families are at an increased risk for experiencing ACEs and toxic stress. Investment in targeted support for children to offset these effects can contribute to healthier, more resilient New York families.

Home visiting is a proven prevention strategy. Yet the Executive Budget includes a 20 percent cut to Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), from \$3 million to \$2.4 million. We request that the Legislature appropriate \$1 million to restore the Executive Budget cut and support sustainability at existing sites.

In addition, the elimination of Public-Private Partnership grants and 20 percent withholds on state funding in 2020 have placed a significant financial strain on home visiting programs. As a result, many programs have been forced to lay off staff, reduce capacity, and in some instances, close their doors.

The populations hit hardest by these cuts are the same populations hit hardest by the pandemic and centuries of racial injustice—low-income women and families of color. **Now is not the time to decrease these essential services.**

PCANY supports the Executive Budget maintenance of \$26 million in HFNY funding and the restoration of funding for NFP, Parents as Teachers, and ParentChild+ to maintain existing programs.

PCANY also asks that you continue to support the First 1,000 Days on Medicaid Initiative, specifically the pilot project sights in Monroe, Chemung, Albany, and Brooklyn counties. This project is a step in the right direction to expand access to programs by increasing light-touch screening and referrals to services. Ideally, PCANY wants universally-offered home visiting so that every new parent receives the benefits that so few are offered now.

PCANY Home Visiting Coordination Initiative

The Home Visiting Coordination Initiative (HVCI) is a forum for home visitors, parents, and community providers in the early childhood sector to collaborate and better support families. The project has highlighted the necessity for coordinated access to and delivery of home visiting programs in NYS.

The overarching theme from the Final 2020 HVCI Report was to develop a plan for statewide implementation of prenatal home visiting

- Implementation of universal prenatal home visiting (first in the country)
- Launch of a public awareness campaign to educate families and expectant parents about the benefits of home visiting
- Expansion of coordinated intake (one-stop-shop for families; referrals to the right program for them)
- Investment in workforce supports and professional development to increase staff (and therefore family) retention and decrease turnover; enhance program quality

We will continue to speak with you about legislative pathways to the implementation of our recommendations, which will be released soon. **In the meantime, we ask that you shore up existing programs so that, when universally-offered home visiting becomes a reality, New York State has programs to refer higher need families to.**

REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT

Primary Prevention

Trauma-Informed Initiatives

A trauma-informed approach is relevant and necessary in both policy and practice. Policies and procedures crafted to prevent re-traumatization and to address underlying emotional/social trauma may be a strategy to address health and social issues impacting NYS today-- substance and alcohol abuse, incarceration, domestic violence, and obesity. Knowledge about ACEs and preventing ACEs is an important framework for law enforcement, healthcare, social services, and government agencies to consider.

PCANY is in the process of developing training materials that embody the tenets of a trauma-informed approach. With this initiative, PCANY aims to:

- Prevent ACEs in future generations
- Identify and mitigate the effects of childhood trauma
- Teach resiliency with strengths-based approaches (such as the Protective Factors Framework)

PCANY is in the process of crafting model curricula for Pediatric, OBGYN, and other healthcare providers that interact with children and families. The curricula will cover Trauma-Informed Care (TIC). TIC recognizes and responds to signs, symptoms, and risks of trauma. Integration of knowledge about adversity promotes prevention of re-traumatization and a strengths-based, patient-centered approach for incoming healthcare professionals. **PCANY requests that our work is supported at the State level.**

Family Resource Centers

Family Resource Centers (FRC's) are community-based sources of support for parents and caregivers. FRC's embody the Protective Factors framework by serving as a dependable resource for education and facilitating social connections for parents in communities. **In neighborhoods where FRC's are in place, the rate of child maltreatment decreases.** Flexible and family-focused, FRC's provide a culturally-sensitive environment that can be especially important in the context of the dual pandemics facing our country today - COVID-19 and racial injustice.

FRC's are a potential place to launch a public education campaign or to promote information/resources about the COVID-19 vaccine. Communities that have experienced inequities and discrimination in healthcare appraise the vaccine with mistrust and tension. To promote the message about the vaccine's safety and effectiveness, and begin to remedy historically deep-seated mistrust, please continue to support FRC presence in communities.

In addition to serving as a resource for education and parent-child interaction, FRC's provide health information programming, family enrichment programming, and may serve as food pantries or libraries (depending on community need).

Additionally, PCANY echoes the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation (MECF) request for the restoration of \$602,000 to support community-based programs serving children, families, and expectant parents across NYS.

Abusive Partner Intervention Programs

One out of four parents with young children in NYS worry about substance abuse and domestic violence in the family (Raising New York, 2020). Children and youth who live with domestic violence are affected by the experience. Children can display a variety of behaviors due to witnessing domestic violence and those behaviors can affect their ability to be successful in school and other social settings. Thirty to sixty percent of perpetrators of domestic violence abuse children in the household. **Exposure to ACEs, such as domestic violence, has also been linked with long-term health impacts. Recognizing, responding to, and preventing ACEs can have a domino effect upon a list of public health concerns -- obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and mental health disorders.**

Abusive partner intervention programs in New York currently operate with no licensure or oversight. **PCANY echoes the OPDV request for oversight of abusive partner intervention programs.** This change will improve the response to accountability for those who harm and ensure that programs are appropriately monitored. Communities and the court system will then be able to confidently utilize this resource as a component of their response to domestic violence.

A streamlined system for domestic violence intervention and response, overseen by OPDV, can result in a more unified, trauma-informed system in NYS.

Parent/Community Education

Many important programs exist in NYS that enrich and improve children's lives. However, frameworks that strengthen the operating capacity and connections between these programs, such as Help Me Grow (HMG), should be considered by NYS to fund and pursue. **HMG is a system that coordinates community services such as health care, early learning services, nutrition information and parent support.** HMG utilizes and builds upon existing community resources to better connect services to families. With this framework, healthcare providers have the ability to refer families to other services in the sector (such as counseling or substance abuse support services). Providers are also able to educate families about child development. HMG emphasizes developmental milestones and the importance of strengthening families. **Currently, the HMG model is being implemented in two locations in NYS - Onondaga County and Long Island.**

As a central hub for service delivery, HMG is a framework that could provide a referral to home visiting services to families and streamline health service delivery to low-income, expectant or new mothers that may require additional support.

Closing

The country is facing a tumultuous era of uncertainty and unrest. Mounting tension surrounding public health and social issues have enveloped NYS. Governor Cuomo articulated in his unique State of the State address that New York is tough and that New Yorkers are resilient. However, these statements are in reference to the current generation. As we look toward the future, combatting the virus, stabilizing the State, and rebuilding in the wake of uncertainty, "Do we move forward or backward? *The future is in our hands.*" The *future* Governor Cuomo made reference to is the children of New York State. PCANY believes that resilience is fostered at an early age when Protective Factors and prevention measures are deeply ingrained at the community level. In pursuit of this vision, PCANY requests that you consider our budget requests to strengthen families and serve New York children.

In closing, we support the agendas of coalition partners working on: kinship care, foster care, mental health, reproductive rights, and LGBTQ+ issues.