



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## Supporting New York's Families: Prenatal to Pre-K

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS February 9, 2016

| ISSUE: **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**



Albany, NY - The Senate Democratic Conference, led by Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, today unveiled a set of policy initiatives spearheaded by the Senate Democratic Policy Group to help New York families during the critical early childhood period. These initiatives include a strong paid family leave program, increased access to childcare, assistance for New York's working parents and caregivers, and support for the growth and development of all New York children. Multiple organizations that provide support and advocacy for new parents, young children and working class New Yorkers have already offered praise and support for

the Senate Democratic proposals. When enacted, these initiatives would result in over \$2 billion annually in savings and financial returns for New York State as well as additional economic activity.

The Senate Democratic plan focuses on the critical early years of a child's life – from the prenatal period until the beginning of pre-kindergarten. Ideas advanced by the Senate Democrats in a report released today by the Senate Democratic Policy Group include a robust paid family leave program that will provide employees with two-thirds of their salaries during the time they care for infants and loved ones in need. Additionally, the "Childcare Advance" program would allow families to defer up to \$2,000 of their state taxes each year while young children are in childcare. The Senate Democrats are also calling for additional subsidies to help pay for childcare for working families. Another Senate Democratic policy initiative would increase treatment resources to expand support for women facing maternal depression.

"Investing in our state's children is not only the right thing to do, it makes smart economic sense as well," Senate Democratic Leader Stewart-Cousins said. "State government has a responsibility to provide New York families with more support services and assistance during the critical early childhood years. The Senate Democrats will continue to fight to improve the lives of all New Yorkers and it is my hope that the Senate Republican Majority will join us to pass these common sense initiatives."

These policy initiatives are discussed in a report by the Senate Democratic Policy Group released today: "Pre-Natal to Pre-K: Supporting New York's Young Families." Policy initiatives outlined in the Senate Democratic Policy Group's report include:

### **Establish Family Friendly Workplace Practices**

- Implement a 12-week paid family leave program utilizing the existing Temporary Disability Insurance system for implementation, as three other states have already done.
- Support employee requests for flexible schedules and protect employees from retaliation for making such requests.
- Enhance protection for employees for split or cancelled shifts.
- Improve notice provided to employees for schedules and schedule changes.

Eric Williams, Campaign Director for the Paid Family Leave Campaign, said, “The New York State Senate Democratic Conference’s white paper is clear: to build strong, family friendly workplaces, New York needs paid family leave. A strong paid family leave program will mean that families are no longer forced to choose between caring for their loved ones and their financial security. Paid family leave must ensure 12 weeks of job-protected leave for all private sector workers, at 2/3rds of their weekly wage and increase the rate of Temporary Disability Insurance so that the program works for all New Yorkers. We commend the Senate Democratic Conference for continuing to prioritize the passage of paid family leave in 2016.”

Stuart Appelbaum, President of the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union, UFCW, said, “New Yorkers understand that workers shouldn’t be forced to choose between their jobs and taking care of their loved ones when there is a health issue. Paid family leave would provide New York workers with peace of mind, and prevent the financial nightmare of losing income when there is a medical situation in their family.”

Sherry Leiwant, Co-President and Co-Founder, A Better Balance, said, “As an organization working for policies to enable women – and men -- to care for their families without risking their economic security we have been appalled at the growing problem of unstable work

schedules in many industries as well as workers' fear of retaliation for even requesting a schedule that will suit their family needs. When a worker has no advance notice of his or her schedule, arranging child care or family time becomes impossible. Enacting policies that will require some advance notice of schedules and will prohibit retaliation for asking for a schedule change would be a great step forward for New York's families. We applaud publication of this white paper calling for policies to address abusive scheduling practices that hurt New York families."

### **Increase Access to Childcare Through the "Childcare Advance" and Childcare Subsidies**

- Average annual childcare costs in New York State are \$10,140 to \$14,144 per year for an infant and \$9,776 to \$11,700 for a four-year-old.
- Establish the "Childcare Advance," a deferral of state taxes to help 134,000 families afford the cost of early childcare and generate over \$80 million in savings and financial returns to the state per year plus economic activity.
- Increase support for childcare subsidies with \$190 million of increased funding to expand the number of eligible families receiving subsidies.

Susan Antos, Senior Staff Attorney at the Empire Justice Center, said, "The Empire Justice Center is thrilled that the Senate Democratic conference has prioritized investing in paid family, leave home visiting, and investing in child care subsidies. Investment in child care subsidies is important because it will cost New York State \$190 million to comply with the new eligibility and health and safety requirements of reauthorized federal child care block grant. We look forward to working with conference leader Stewart-Cousins, the Democratic conference in the legislature as a whole to advance these initiatives which are so important to supporting New York's working families."

## **Treat Maternal Depression**

- Make available a central, accessible list of providers offering treatment for maternal depression.
- Invest in treatment resources, including referral networks, peer support, and a strengthened and expanded hotline.
- Develop – in coordination with experts – a state best practice protocol for the treatment of maternal depression, including consideration of telemedicine to make treatment options more widely available.

Leah Kaufman, MD, FACOG, Vice Chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology at SUNY Upstate University Hospital, said, “ACOG District II is committed to working with state policy makers to emphasize the importance of treatment for maternal depression. Depression in the prenatal period can have detrimental effects on women and their families, and timely identification of at-risk women coupled with accessible and quality treatment options are vital to improving clinical outcomes. We are dedicated to collaborating with the state to ensure that comprehensive treatment and referral processes are put in place to support women and families suffering from maternal depression.”

Sonia Murdock, Executive Director and Co-Founder of the Postpartum Resource Center of New York, said, “This legislation is an important investment by New York State to save lives by combating the number one medical complication related to childbearing - maternal depression - and related perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. We fully support these legislative efforts that address this major public health concern that will increase moms, dads, and families getting the critical help and support they need for the prevention and treatment of maternal depression. All New York State babies and families deserve being

made a priority and having our support right from the start.”

### **Offer Evidence-Based Maternal Home Visiting Universally to Eligible Families**

- Provide universal access for eligible families to evidence-based maternal home visiting programs to serve an additional 27,000 families and generate over \$678 million in long-term savings

Winning Beginning NY Coalition, said, “With New York State's emphasis on poverty, we are pleased to see a plan that employs two strategies-- home visiting and child care-- as strategies to combat this plight by strengthening both families and the workforce. We look forward to continuing to work with the Legislature to prioritize early learning.”

### **Create a New York State Office of Early Childhood**

- Create an Office of Early Childhood to ensure the state is using all available early childhood resources to maximize benefits for young children and families.
- The new office would ensure coordination of early childhood programs including oversight of programs and funding streams

Kate Breslin, President and CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, says, “The Senate Democratic Policy Group’s recommendations are right on target and aligned with those of economists and medical professionals alike – invest early in children and their families for the best return on investment. An opportunity gap can begin to develop at or even before birth and can be especially acute for the nearly one in four (24.4%) New York State children under age five who live in poverty. Since seventy-five percent of brain growth

and 85% of intellect, personality and social skills develop before age five, it is imperative that we invest in our youngest children and their families – with affordable and high quality child care; workplace policies that support caregiving; screening and treatment for maternal depression; and maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting – long before children enter school.”

Recent studies have demonstrated both the enormous impact of the prenatal and early childhood period on a child’s development as well as the substantial benefits of state investment in these critical early years. Unfortunately, families across New York State continue to struggle to make ends meet and are often unable to provide vital developmental support to their children as a result. That is why the Senate Democrats have sponsored legislation to address the findings of the white paper and help New York children receive the support and services they deserve.

Senator Stewart-Cousins concluded, “It’s time for state government to stand up for New York families and ensure we provide essential support services and assistance during the earliest stages of a child’s life. I am proud to stand up and support these common sense legislative initiatives.”

For a full copy of the Senate Democratic Conference Policy Group’s white paper, Pre-Natal to Pre-K: Supporting New York’s Young Families, [click here](#).