



**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 2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Public Protection**

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through civic engagement, research, and advocacy. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure the wellbeing of New York's children, families, and communities.

We would like to thank Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, and all the committee members for holding today's hearing on Public Protection in the FY26 Executive Budget.

Invest in the Youth Justice Innovation Fund

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.¹ 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 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-



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

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.

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.

Support and Protect Immigrant Families

Thousands of New York immigrant households are in increasing danger of detention, permanent family separation, and deportation. In New York State, there are 215,700 immigrant children, and more than 250,000 U.S. citizen children live with at least one undocumented family member.¹ The scale of federal threats to immigrant New Yorkers demands a robust response from State leaders to protect and support immigrant families.

We join the Care for Immigrant Families Coalition in calling for the following legislation and investments:

- **Invest \$165 million in the New York State budget for immigration legal services and infrastructure**, including the establishment of a comprehensive legal services infrastructure to train and hire additional legal teams.
- **Pass the Access to Representation Act (ARA)**, which would establish a right to counsel for immigrants facing deportation (S.141/A.170);
- **Pass the Bolstering Unrepresented Immigrant Legal Defense Act (BUILD)**, which would lay groundwork for the ARA by funding the infrastructure necessary for legal services providers to create, maintain, and expand robust programs to protect immigrants under attack.



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

We also support passage of the New York for All Act (A5686/S987), which would prohibit and regulate the discovery and disclosure of immigration status by New York state and local government entities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

ⁱ Immigrants in New York. American Immigration Council. January 2025