



TESTIMONY

FY2026 JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING – HUMAN SERVICES

BLACK CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE – NEW YORK STATE

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

Black Child Development Institute New York State (BCDI NYS) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to serve Black children and families to ensure their present wellbeing and bright futures. Our service is not exclusive to Black children and families; however, our work centers the needs of Black children and families with an understanding of the long-standing legal, social, and cultural barriers that create the disparities they face. BCDI NYS is a member of the nationwide network of affiliates of the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), founded in 1971. Our research and evidence-based work is centered around Eight Essential Outcomes for Black children:

Positive narratives – every Black child is seen as a child

Education – attends a school that affirms and expands them

Health – is born at a healthy weight

Nutrition – enjoys meals with vegetables

Safe Community – lives in an uplifting community where they can play, explore and thrive

Climate – breathes clean air and drinks clean water

Digital Safety – hangs out on a safe and appropriate internet

Representation – sees themselves reflected in books and toys

The testimony I provide today addresses proposals aimed at reversing disinvestment trends in Black and other marginalized communities and enhancing the wellbeing of children and families. These proposals include the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund, End Child Poverty initiative, and Black Studies Initiative. I strongly urge you to incorporate these provisions into the final FY2026 New York State Budget.

Child and Family Wellbeing Fund

Everyday surroundings offer significant advantages to children even if their own family is struggling. Specific neighborhood enhancements can make a big difference – safe playspaces and greenery, density of support organizations and civic events, convenient access to critical family resources, like food and child care, and vibrant social fabric.

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Recent research has documented the incredible effects of neighborhoods on children – health and cognitive impacts, social mobility, and lifelong earnings. Yet decades of redlining and racist disinvestment have resulted in vastly inequitable neighborhood conditions. African-American and Latinx parents are disparately impacted by the CPS system for challenges faced by families of all races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status. The majority of reports to the state child abuse hotline are made not for abuse, but for poverty-related conditions. The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund is a chance to make a corrective shift to ensure that all New York children live within neighborhoods that are set up for their wellbeing. Designed as a five-year pilot, The Fund aims to serve ten communities with the highest rates of child protective services (CPS) contact and disproportionate impacts on families of color. A \$30 million investment in The Fund will aid community-led projects that strengthen families, reduce their vulnerability to CPS system contact, and invest in supports that enhance family preservation, reunification, and healing by resourcing local and grassroots organizations that families trust. The Fund would also:

- Center community expertise in resource decisions with an advisor board that includes child welfare system-impacted parents and youth.
- Intentionally invest in the social fabric using the Asset-Based Community Development model to build social capital and collective action.
- Build long-term community capacity by providing technical assistance to support growth.
- Reduce the likelihood of family involvement in the child protective system by investing in projects and resources known to reduce family stress and vulnerability to child welfare involvement.
- Brings joy by supporting family activities, community gatherings and neighborly care.

We urge you to include The Fund in the enacted budget as a necessary and innovative investment in the wellbeing of families and children.

Black Studies Initiative

A community-based Black Studies Initiative is needed now more than ever! In New York City, the Black Studies curriculum, which is publicly available online, has been deployed in New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) and is available for implementation in every district in the NYCPS system. Outside of New York City, however, districts have not adopted the curriculum. Moreover, the teaching of Black history, the African diaspora, and pedagogy based on African traditions and Black culture are all efforts rooted at the grassroots level, outside of the school system, but has never been sufficiently funded. The Black Studies

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Initiative would engage community partners across the state to roll out Black Studies programs in local communities. Funding for the Black Studies Initiative would help provide technical support and micro-grants to local community based organizations and to assess the impact of the initiative. The need for and benefits of the Black Studies curriculum are evident. The erasure of Black history, attack on anti-Black racism efforts is well underway. New York State can stand strong and fight back by supporting the expansion of Black Studies at the community level, protecting against the prohibitions that government institutions might face and recognizing the power of local communities. Launched in communities by community members across New York, we believe it is a game-changer for our youth when it comes to academics, behavior, self-esteem, positive engagement, and more. Research has shown that benefits accrue to all people, not just Black people. Programs would be open to all regardless of culture, ethnicity, or race, of course. Technical assistance provided by the initiative would help community groups to establish effective and sustainable programs that they can further develop. A coalition of educators, subject-matter experts, experienced leaders, researchers, and more will provide technical support to assist in tailoring the Black Studies curriculum to local community programs – summer programs, drop-in classes, vacation week programs, Saturday schools, etc. With this initiative, local communities will establish and deliver programs at no or low cost to participants. Funding for the initiative would be used to provide technical support to community-based organizations and micro-grants to cover costs such as background checks for volunteers and staff, materials, technology, and transportation.

The contributions, lived experiences, and cultural landscape of descendants of African people have long been overlooked, underappreciated, unexplored, dismissed, and unknown for far too many people and for far too long. The results have been marginalized and divided communities, unrealized potential of young people, and myriad negative impacts from health to wealth to lifespan. That must change. The collective future of our state and country rests on it.

End Child Poverty and Expand Affordable Child Care Access

We also strongly support New York Can End Poverty proposals to implement to fully implement the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council recommendations. We also support the Empire State Campaign for Child Care proposals to expand access to affordable child care. Documentation submitted with this testimony describes the proposals which BCDI NYS urges you to enact.