

PROPOSAL

# Create a Division of Family Well-Being Within the New York City Department of Community Safety

AUGUST 2025

Over the past two years, advocates and city leaders have built a vision for enhanced community investment to strengthen family well-being and keep children safely together with their families and in their communities. An office that centralizes and coordinates citywide investments in families is an essential missing piece that can bolster the current Community Safety Plan.

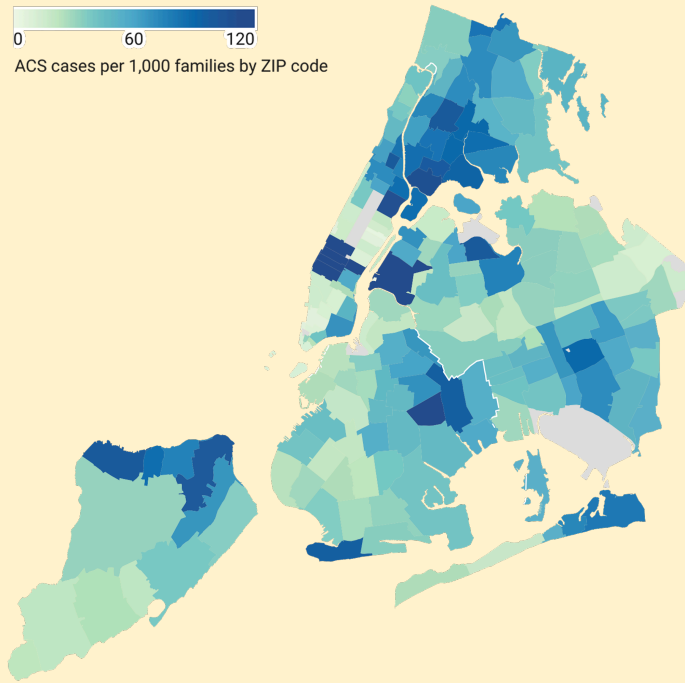
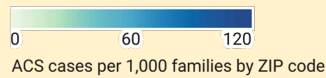
**Healthy, well-resourced and connected families are essential to the safety and security of our City.** As the U.S. Surgeon General observed in his [2024 report](#), family life “is essential not only for the health of children but also for the health of society.” Currently, City programs that support parents and stem family crises are underfunded and lack the coordination necessary for long-term family well-being and safety. These programs require centralized coordination and implementation.

**Relying on the child protective system to respond to issues of poverty and adversity is counter to everything we know about child and family well-being.** Our City too often surveils, disrupts, separates and destroys families through involvement with the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) and youth justice system rather than connecting them to trusted, community-based supports to enhance well-being and safety. Policing of families falls heavily and almost exclusively on the City’s poor, Black and Latino children and families. A groundswell of advocacy groups and research organizations are increasingly calling for the adoption of a public health approach to prevent, interrupt and heal families from crises. This can:

- \* Enhance family safety and security, improving children’s health and wellness across the life span;
- \* Close gaps that lead to family crises and reduce ACS and youth justice intervention;
- \* Contribute to community safety, as secure families are a building block of community care.

Raising children is sacred work. It should matter to all of us. [Parents] across all backgrounds want to provide their kids with a foundation for happiness and success. Yet too many fear they won’t be able to provide what’s necessary or their kids won’t be able to access what they need in order to lead a fulfilling life... The more parents feel they are falling short of meeting their children’s needs, the more they scramble to make up lost ground.

– Surgeon General’s report [Parents Under Pressure](#), 2024



## ACS Cases in 2024

While ACS involvement has decreased in the past 5 years, it remains a crisis. *Almost 45% of Black and Latino children in New York City will experience an ACS investigation by age 18.* Investigations and removals of children from their families are concentrated geographically and racially.

The neighborhoods most impacted by conditions of poverty are also those most targeted by ACS intervention. This correlation reflects decades of divestment and severe economic precarity for New York City families of color.

## The Division of Family Well-Being will bring a cross-agency, centralized approach to child and family well-being as an essential locus of community safety.

Strategic attention to the conditions impacting parenting and caregiving is necessary if we are to truly make safety a reality. The Division of Family Well-Being will:

- \* Centralize, coordinate and harmonize family support policy, funding and programming to end the siloed, fractured oversight of current resources so they work better and reach more people.
- \* Support community-led planning and grantmaking to identify and build on neighborhood assets and fill gaps.
- \* Identify and create new, culturally responsive family programs that prevent and de-escalate family crises and promote family integrity, connection, resilience and safety. Examples include credible messenger programs such as networks of peer support, system navigator programs to improve access to existing services and resources, restorative justice-based family mediation and crisis-response programs de-escalate conflict within families and provide trusted resources.
- \* Prioritize investment and capacity-building support for grassroots organizations that families trust, create platforms for community engagement in policy and planning processes, and build up community leadership and accountability mechanisms.

Safety is “a set of resources, relationships, skills, and tools that can be developed, disseminated, and deployed to prevent, interrupt, and heal from harm.”

– Kaba & Ritchie, [Reclaiming Safety](#)

- \* Deeply intertwine new strategies with other resources that families rely on, like childcare, housing, transportation, schools, income supports and wages, with a focus on the neighborhoods most targeted by the ACS and youth justice systems.
- \* Reinvest millions in City savings from new federal prevention funds and from reductions in ACS spending.

## **Intentional Planning for Family-Supportive Communities: What the Research Says**

Research confirms that everyday surroundings offer significant advantages to children *even if their own family is struggling*. Community assets like safe play spaces and greenery; density of nonprofits and civic events; convenient access to critical family resources, like grocery stores and childcare; and a vibrant social fabric enhance children's health, cognitive development, social mobility, and lifelong earnings. In neighborhoods where residents look out for one another and band together to solve problems, health is better and crime is lower, even when socioeconomic disadvantage is the same. Specifically, collective efficacy has been shown to impact domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, adult depression, children's development and behavior, and family health.

Yet decades of redlining and structurally racist disinvestment have resulted in vastly inequitable conditions. Community organizations that help keep children, youth and families healthy and thriving by filling in the gaps in our social safety net often struggle to keep their doors open. Planning, coordination and resources specifically designed for families will produce better results in both safety *and* well-being.

### **A dedicated focus on families will significantly enhance the effects of inter-agency innovation and coordination for community well-being and safety.**

Beyond enhancements to individual Offices, the current Community Safety Plan seeks to align City policies and collective assets, like environmental design, streetlights and greenspace, and to lead cross-agency symposia on new ways to strengthen safety. Bringing a Family Well-Being lens to this innovative framework will lead to synergistic effects that increase safety and well-being for families and communities.

**The Division of Family Well-Being builds on a legacy of leadership in NYC.** Our City's advocacy and leadership in protecting family rights and child well-being has long been recognized, achieving significant reductions in the number of children separated from their families by foster care and juvenile detention. This Family Well-Being vision, led by the Narrowing The Front Door to NYC's Child Welfare System Workgroup in partnership with City leadership, and informed by the work of the New York State Child and Family Wellbeing Fund Workgroup, builds on that legacy.

Now, by taking bold action to synchronize planning for community safety with a commitment to robust, intentional investment in family well-being, our City has the opportunity to once again be a leader in innovative, progressive, human-centered government design.