

Create an Office of Family Well-Being Within the New York City Department of Community Safety

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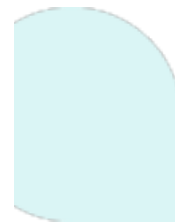
Over the past two years, advocates and city leaders have built a vision for enhanced community investment to strengthen family well-being and keep children safely together with their families and in their communities. An office that centralizes and coordinates city investments in families is an essential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

A public health approach to family well-being can reduce crisis intervention

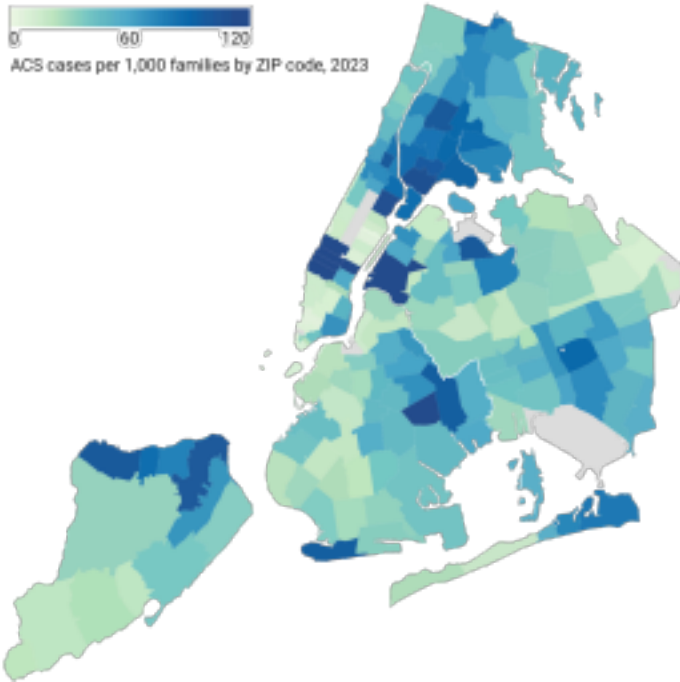
and family separation. Our City too often surveils, disrupts, separates and destroys families through involvement with the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) and youth justice system rather than connecting them to trusted, community-based supports to enhance well-being and safety. Policing 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 community support 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 NYC

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

The neighborhoods most impacted by conditions of poverty and crime are also those most targeted by ACS intervention. This correlation reflects decades of disinvestment, the wealth gap and economic precarity for New York City families of color.

The Office of Family Well-Being will bring a community-led 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 Office of Family Well-Being will:

- * Ensure a holistic approach to family support policy, funding and programming so that city resources 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.
- * Prioritize investment and capacity-building support for grassroots organizations that

family trust, with a focus on the neighborhoods most targeted by ACS and the youth justice system.

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

- * Reinvest millions from new federal prevention funds and from cost-savings due to reductions in ACS cases.

Gaps in city services and resources contribute to child welfare involvement.

Child welfare involvement is most likely when families experience economic setbacks or are in need of basic services, like therapy. NYC is rich in programs and resources to support family life. However, they are unevenly and inequitably distributed and difficult to navigate. Families are often reported because it’s challenging to navigate the city’s family support options but easy to call the child abuse and neglect hotline. When support is hard to access, family challenges can build into crises.

Parents who rely on city programs and services report needing navigation support that is cross-agency, supportive and peer-centered. Word of mouth is how parents say they learn about resources—through people and organizations they trust. A neighborhood-based strategy that invests in grassroots organizations and the social fabric can ensure that families find the support they need. The following are some of the barriers parents face accessing support and their solutions:

	Solutions
<p>Barriers *</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mistrust * Stigma and Shame * Fear of Judgement & Consequences * Normalization of Hardship * Resource & Time Scarcity * Work and Childcare Schedules * Knowledge Gaps and Misinformation * High Cognitive Load * Choice Overload and Decision Fatigue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Trusted Messengers * Peer-Based Models * Mandated Reporter Declarations * Neighborhood Proximity * Proactive Outreach * One-Stop Shops * Warm Handoffs * Drop-in and Extended Hours * Building Community

Families want greater city investment in family-supportive grassroots community organizations; coordinated, safe and accessible pathways to family support; flexible supports that are responsive to their lived experience; and community leadership in setting priorities, designing

programs and directing funding.

Office of Family Well-Being Programs

This Office would act as a champion, connector and capacity-builder, supporting community groups and collaborating with city leadership to enhance families' access to core city services and resources, particularly in neighborhoods where child welfare involvement is most common. Technical assistance to assess program and community impacts will build up high-quality programs at scale.

Community-Led Planning and Grantmaking

- * A framework that combines data on local assets and community knowledge can support city-led planning to increase equity and reduce child welfare involvement
- * Planning anchored by Asset-Based Community Development can identify local capacities to build on and gaps to fill, while building community networks
- * A budget for community-led grantmaking tied to the planning process allows for immediate flexible spending on small and medium-sized projects

Reducing child welfare involvement requires addressing citywide service gaps. Parents have consistently called for city investment in:

- * Navigation support to access basic needs and services
- * Family relationships and healing support
- * Safe spaces for family joy and connection

This office can coordinate and support programmatic innovation, experimentation and scaling, and directly oversee core programs.

Proposed Budget Oversight and Innovation of Key Family Support Programs

New York City's current Community Partnership Program (\$14 million) and Enrichment Centers(\$16.1 million) within ACS, as well as similar family support programs in other agencies, can move into the jurisdiction of the Office of Family Well-Being and be aligned and expanded to be more effective. Community planning and grantmaking can begin in the five highest-impacted neighborhoods(\$15 million).

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. Community-led planning and grantmaking overseen by this Office will enhance resources with broad safety impacts.

The Office 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.

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