



**Child Poverty Reduction  
Advisory Council**

# **Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council Public Benefits Committee**

Meeting 01 – September 14, 2023

# Reminders – Administrative Items

- Meetings are being recorded and live streamed

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# Welcome

# Welcome

- **Committee Co-Chairs** – Remarks

*Barbara Guinn*, NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

*Lisa Fitzpatrick*, Human Resources Administration (HRA)

*Candace Cabral*, Community Member

*Kathy Connerton*, Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council (REDC)

- **Committee Members** – Introductions

- Name, where you are from, and overview of your organization
- Experience with child poverty, public benefits policy, what interests you about this Committee

# Goals for Public Benefits Committee Meeting

- Review procedural / organizational matters
- Recap of evidence-based research discussed by CPRAC
- Begin discussion of public benefits policy reform options
- Outline next steps, goals

# CPRAC

## Public Benefits Committee

*Procedure and Organization*

# Recap – Child Poverty Reduction Act

- **Declares poverty is a problem and a policy priority in NYS**
- **Creates the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC)**
  - Sets out broad structure of Council, including statutory appointments
- **Charges CPRAC with:**
  - studying child poverty in NYS,
  - developing recommendations for reducing child poverty by 50% over 10 years
  - measuring and reporting on progress towards that goal



# Recap – CPRAC

- **17 statutory members**
- Agreed on need for additional expertise, and greater experiential, geographic, and demographic diversity
- Additional members serve as “advisory experts” - not as voting members
- Advisory experts will participate in CPRAC mission via committee structure

# Committees – Procedure and Organization

- **Public Benefits Committee is one of five subject-area committees**
  1. Tax Policy, 2. Public Benefits, 3. Housing, 4. Employment/Wages, 5. Childhood
- Committees convene after CPRAC statutory members meet for orientation on each subject
- As of the CPRAC meeting on August 10, which covered Public Benefits and Childhood, orientations have been provided on all subjects and as of today, all committees have convened
- Based on these orientations, evidence-based research, and comprehensive data analyses, committees will help develop specific recommendations in each policy area
- Each committee will determine their form and function as a group, including schedule

# Public Benefits Committee – Organizational Goals

- **Governing policies and procedures:**
  - Open Meetings Law
  - Videoconferencing Policy
  - Committees convene independently of the larger body
- **Organizational questions to resolve:**
  - Recommendations due to larger CPRAC group when?\*
  - In Person/Virtual/Hybrid
  - Cadence of Meetings, Length of Meetings
  - Adding agenda items
- **CPRAC goal:**
  - Issue progress report by end of 2023
  - Recommendations TBD based on progress with subject-area committees, ongoing data modeling, and more

# Recap

## *Public Benefits*

# Recap – CPRAC work to date

- **In meetings of CPRAC statutory members, we've explored each key policy area**
  - To orient members, we presented research on anti-poverty proposals in each topic area
  - We also heard from Council members with lived experience in each topic area
  - For each topic area, we began discussing reform options to reduce child poverty
- **Through this process, our goal as a group has been to:**
  - Learn from leading scholars in the field
  - Learn from New Yorkers who've interacted with relevant policies
  - Establish shared foundation of facts: context, data, evidence, opportunities
- **CPRAC discussed Public Benefits on August 10:**
  - Committee will build on facts established in CPRAC's orientation/exploration of these policies

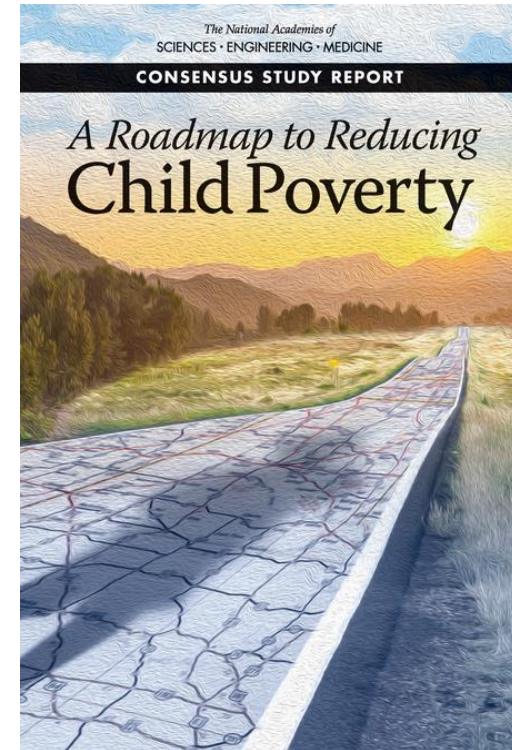
# Recap – Poverty in New York

- CPRAC is using Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) as key metric
- As of 2019, 3 million+ New Yorkers (~16% of all New Yorkers) are living in poverty\*
  - **745,000 New Yorkers under age 18 (~19% of all New Yorkers <18) live in poverty**  
*\*At or below the 100% Supplemental Poverty Rate, using the ACS-based SPM*
- Based on available public data and internal analyses, rough snapshot of demographic breakdown of child poverty in New York (<100 percent ACS, <18 years old):
  - >18 percent of children in NY are living in poverty or nearly 1 in 5
  - Percent in poverty increases to 25 percent for black New Yorkers, 23 percent for Hispanic New Yorkers
  - Almost 3x as many white children in poverty outside of NYC as in NYC
  - ~60 percent of children in poverty live with at least one employed parent
  - ~60 percent of children in poverty live with only one parent
- Researchers at Urban Institute are developing updated comprehensive poverty data for NYS

# Research Recap – National Academy of Sciences “Roadmap” on Public Benefits

- The NAS analyzed the effects of public benefits policies on poverty – and both of the SNAP policies they analyzed were found to reduce child poverty by more than 10%
- Increasing SNAP benefits by 30 percent for families with children and increasing Summer EBT, along with some other adjustments, (see Option #2 below) would reduce child poverty by 13%

Package or Policy	Description	Percent change from 2015 Baseline 100% SPM
SNAP Policy Option #1	Increase SNAP benefits by 20 percent for families with children, make adjustments for the number of children age 12 and above in the home (\$360 more per teenager per year), and increase the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBT) (\$180 more per child per summer in pre-kindergarten through 12 <sup>th</sup> grade).	-10.1%
SNAP Policy Option #2	Increase SNAP benefits by 30 percent, make adjustments for the number of children age 12 and above in the home (\$360 more per teenager per year), and increase the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBT) (\$180 more per child per summer in pre-kindergarten through 12 <sup>th</sup> grade).	-13.0%



# Recap – Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

- In CPRAC’s orientation on Public Benefits, OTDA Acting Commissioner Barbara Guinn presented an overview of the public benefits landscape in New York, including related programs administered by New York State:
  - How public benefits are provided in New York, including efforts to understand where more New Yorkers and which New Yorkers are under-enrolled
  - Public benefits provided to New Yorkers by the State, including food assistance, public (cash) assistance, housing assistance, energy assistance, and more
  - Summary of recent public benefits investments and reforms
  - Discussion of challenges and opportunities for further improvement



# Recap – Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

- **OTDA began by discussing what public benefits look like in New York State – supports offered include:**
  - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
  - Public Assistance (PA)
  - Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)
  - State Supplement Program (SSP)
  - Eligibility determinations for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
  - Emergency housing/shelter and certain housing stability services
  - Child Support Services
  - Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (supportive housing)
  - And more

# Recap – Food Assistance

- **SNAP provides eligible households with monthly benefits for purchasing food at grocery stores, farmers markets, online stores, and other retailers (more than 16,000 statewide)**
  - Must meet income requirements (below a % of Federal Poverty Level ranging from 130% to 200% FPL depending on circumstance) and other requirements
  - Can apply and manage documentation online, by mail/fax or at a district office
- **2.9 million people in NYS received SNAP benefits in May 2023 (14% of NY residents)**
  - Average household benefit: \$233/month, can be used to purchase most food items (monthly benefit levels adjusted annually to reflect food costs)
  - New Yorkers receive SNAP for a range of months, with many receiving for multiple years
  - Many households that receive SNAP also receive PA and/or SSI
- **OTDA contracts with dozens of providers and organizations to conduct SNAP education and outreach in communities (at sites like health centers, pantries, libraries, churches, etc)**
  - Outreach can help households complete and submit SNAP application, recertify
  - Education can help households manage SNAP resources, eat healthy, meal plan, and more

# Recap – Public Assistance

- **Public Assistance provides a monthly benefit to low- and no-income New Yorkers to help households pay for their basic needs such as rent, utilities, and clothing (PA grant is comprised of allowances for different items, including basics, shelter, and home energy)**
  - Must be very low-income to apply (at or below State-set “Standard of need”, which varies by household size and county), meet resource requirements, program requirements (job search or work requirements, drug/alcohol screening/treatment), and more based on circumstance
  - Once receiving PA, additional earning disregards apply that allow households to retain benefits with higher incomes (family of 3 in NYC may earn up to \$29,640 and retain PA)
  - Can apply and manage documentation online, by mail/fax or at a district office
- **579,000 people in NYS received PA in May 2023 (3% of New Yorkers)**
  - Max PA grant for household of 1 in NYC is \$398, and for household for 3 is \$789 (no statutory or regulatory requirement to adjust annually based on cost-of-living)
  - Additional allowances may be provided based on circumstance or to address emergencies
  - New Yorkers often receive PA for at least a year, with some receiving for multiple years
  - Almost all PA cases also receive SNAP benefits

# Recap – Energy Assistance

- **HEAP Regular benefits are grants to help residents pay their energy costs (reducing a household's annual energy costs by an average of 21%)**
  - Must meet income (60% of NYS median income or 150% of FPL) and other requirements
  - Can apply and manage documentation online, by mail/fax or at a district office
  - HEAP is 100% federally funded, with annual capped grant awards
- **During the last HEAP funding year, 1.5 million households (20%) received a HEAP benefit (more than 500,000 households included an individual under age 6 or over age 60)**
  - Households received on average \$485/year in HEAP bill assistance in the last program year, with larger benefits for households with young children, seniors, or disabled New Yorkers
  - In addition to the Regular benefit, HEAP provides assistance for energy emergencies, equipment repair and replacement, cooling supports, weatherization, and more

# Recap – Income Assistance

- **SSI is a federal program that provides monthly payments to individuals 65 or older or with a disabling condition and with limited income**
  - Must be very low income (less than \$934/month income for an individual, or less than \$1391/month for a couple), meet resource requirements, and be older than 65, blind, or have certain disabilities
- **NYS developed State Supplement Program (SSP) to strengthen SSI**
  - Eligibility determined by SSA, no separate NY application (eligible for SSP if eligible for SSI)
  - \$23-87 for individuals living in the community, \$200-600 for those living in congregate care
- **612,000 people (3% of New Yorkers) received SSI/SSP in May 2023**
  - Maximum monthly SSI/SSP payment for 2023 is: \$1,001 for one person, \$1,475 for a couple
  - Average SSI/SSP benefit was \$670 per month (as income reduces the benefit)

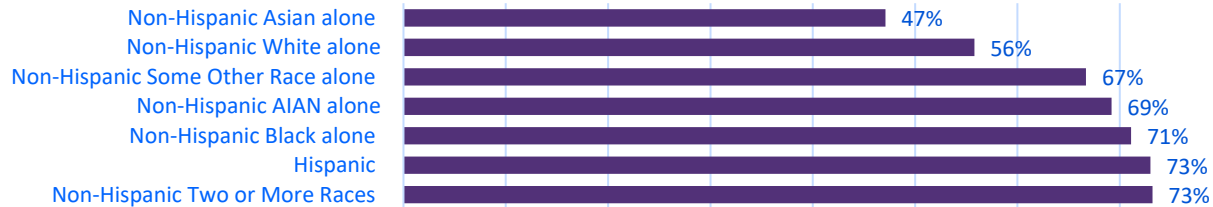
# Recap – Housing Assistance

- **OTDA oversees the provision of different types of housing assistance to New Yorkers in need**
  - Provision of shelter services by local districts for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness (including temporary housing, as well as Code Blue shelter in cold weather)
  - Housing benefits via PA grants, shelter supplements, local rental assistance programs, and more
  - Homelessness prevention services, rent arrears payments, rapid rehousing and other interventions that help New Yorkers avoid entering shelter
  - Capital funds to develop emergency shelters, transitional facilities, and permanent housing, including supportive housing with services on-site via HHAP program
- **Many New Yorkers rely on these vital services in times of need**
  - More than 100,000 individuals experience homelessness and utilize shelter across NYS yearly
  - 12,000 households currently receive a State-supported shelter supplement (average supplement in NYC: \$968; average supplement in rest of State: \$421)
  - 402 active capital projects (more than 558 sites comprised of 17,855 beds of different types, from emergency to transitional to supportive) via HHAP program

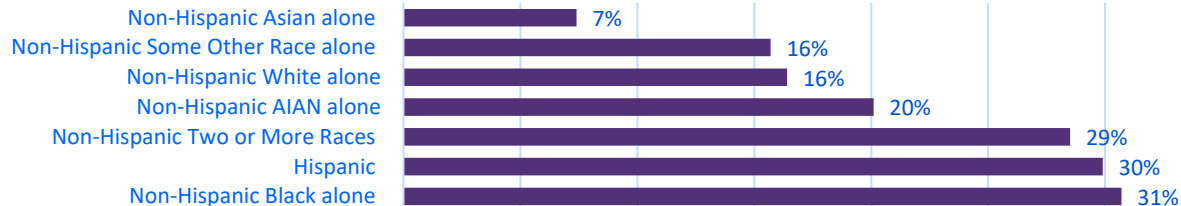
# Recap – Program Access

- Similar to U.S. Census Bureau, OTDA is analyzing data to understand how many New Yorkers (by demographics, geography, etc.) receive SNAP and PA vs how many are eligible
  - Goal is to use data to address underutilization, including gaps among different communities
  - Helps center equity when discussing program reform, opportunities for improvement

Census Bureau 2019 NYS Estimated SNAP Access Rate by Race and Ethnicity



Census Bureau 2019 NYS Estimated TANF Access Rate by Race and Ethnicity



Note:

USDA's 2019 SNAP access rates, which utilize a different methodology, indicate NYS has a rate of 89% and the national average is 82%. Census-based SNAP access rates are lower because the Census Bureau uses survey response data and estimates more people are potentially eligible.

Internal State-level data shows the access rate for PA benefits in NYS is higher than 25%. NYS TANF eligibility requires households to have income below 50% of the FPL at application and NYS provides benefits to children not eligible for TANF through the Safety Net Program. OTDA currently estimates the PA PAI at 67% for children below 50% of the FPL. Children below the poverty line are also served by the SSI program.

# Recap – Recent Reforms

- **OTDA continues working to reform and strengthen public benefits, making them easier for New Yorkers to access and ensuring they provide the support New Yorkers need**
  - Process reforms, including to applications, have made it easier for New Yorkers to apply for and maintain the benefits they need
  - PA reforms, including expanded eligibility and earned income disregards, make it easier for low-income New Yorkers to build income and gain independence
  - Modernized data analysis will help improve service delivery
- **OTDA is focused on areas for reform and improvement**
  - Programs not adjusted (value, certification requirements, etc.) for cost of living/modern realities
  - Program access measures indicate new strategies are needed for program outreach
  - Additional policy changes could reduce ‘benefit cliffs’
  - NYS deploying technology to simplify online application processes and support cross-program enrollments (Integrated Eligibility System), but multi-year initiative



# Recap – Lived Experience

- While the projected impacts of programs like these are very important, we also need to hear directly from New Yorkers that have experienced poverty and utilized related programs
- Often gaps between models that assume 100% uptake (and its associated impact), versus real-world implementation where programs may not reach all eligible families
- In addition to designing anti-poverty programs more effectively (via expansions, increases, etc.), must ensure that eligible families know that help is available - and know how to apply and enroll
- Recommendations must incorporate the perspectives of our Council members and other New Yorkers with lived experience

# Recap – Lived Experience

- **CPRAC statutory members who've lived in poverty provided testimonials about their experiences with different public benefits**
- Pamela Walcott (New York City):
  - Has received SSI for many years, SNAP and PA since 2022
  - Difficulties applying for, accessing, and maintaining benefits
    - Denied for eligibility for many years and unable to obtain benefits until moving out of shelter in 2022 with shelter provider's help
    - Has experienced communications issues that resulted in recertification issues and temporary loss of benefits for which she was eligible
- Candace Cabral (Rochester):
  - Has received SSI since 1990s, SNAP since 2007, and PA and HEAP on and off
  - Difficulties applying for, accessing, and maintaining benefits
    - Challenges navigating application process, including complex language, documentation requirements

# Recap – Ongoing Analyses, Data Needs

- **Renowned researchers at Urban Institute who helped develop NAS “Roadmap” are conducting comprehensive analysis of poverty in NYS, including microsimulation modeling**
  - Analyzing baseline (“before”), where NYS is now (as of the Enacted 2023/24 Budget), and the projected impacts of several different policies (individually and in combination)
  - Shared UI’s comprehensive 2019 baseline analysis in June
  - Shared UI’s preliminary analysis of recently enacted policies (from 2022/23 and 2023/24 Budgets)
  - Will begin to receive data on policy simulations in the coming weeks and months
- **Other data needs**
  - Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)?

# Recap – Modeling Proposed Policies and Reforms

- **As part of their comprehensive analysis of poverty in NYS and microsimulation modelling, Urban Institute will assess the effects of various public benefit reforms on child poverty:**
  - Increase the PA shelter allowance for households with children in increments of 10%, starting with a 50% increase and growing to a 200% increase; also model for a shelter allowance equal to 50%, 60% and 70% of FMR
  - Increase the basic allowance (the portion of the grant based solely on household size) in increments of 10%, starting with a 20% increase and growing to a 100% increase
  - Simplify PA policies by indexing income eligibility and maximum benefit levels to the Federal Poverty guidelines for applicants at 50%, 75% and 100% of Federal Poverty, and for recipients at 150% and 200% of Federal Poverty
  - For all above, apply earned income disregards for program applicants, as are currently provided for recipients
  - Increase the SSP amount by 50% and 100%, for certain groups

# Discussion

## *Public Benefits*

# Public Benefits: Reforms Underway

- **As recapped, OTDA is in the process of implementing a range of public benefits reforms:**
  - Eligibility changes to reach more New Yorkers with public benefits assistance more effectively
    - On SNAP: expanding options for recipients in NYS, including online purchasing options, restaurants, and incentives that support healthy food purchases; streamlining and simplifying processes for seniors
    - On PA: Eliminating outdated/ineffective eligibility tests; expanding eligibility for non-citizens; exempting of certain workers' bonuses from income calculation; increasing amount of earned income that can be disregarded
    - On HEAP: Reducing application burdens, including exempting more income; easing certain interview requirements and permitting phone interviews

# Public Benefits: Key Considerations for Reform

- **As we discuss additional areas for potential reform and specific ideas for improvement, members should openly communicate new or old suggestions:**
  - CPRAC's statutory charge is to recommend ways to reduce child poverty, so our initial focus should be on ideas which could produce significant reductions in the number of children living in poverty in New York State – that is, an idea that could help 10,000 or more families, not a few hundred
  - The group should focus on items the State can reasonably address through state action
  - The group should also consider federal agenda items

# Public Benefits: Key Areas and Ideas for Reform

- As recapped, there are several factors to consider as we work to strengthen public benefits in New York State, especially to address racial disparities:
  - *Benefit access/ take-up*: Must do more to make public benefits accessible and effectively connect eligible families to available assistance statewide
    - New strategies to raise awareness and promote program enrollment/ close gaps?
    - Further reduce barriers to accessing benefits, including streamlining application (IES)?
    - Ways to simplify processes?



# Public Benefits: Key Areas and Ideas for Reform

- As presented by CPRAC and OTDA, there are specific areas for reform that could help achieve these goals:
  - *Benefit levels:* Increasing the amount of support provided via public benefits
    - Certain benefits have remained flat, rather than reflecting New Yorkers real costs of living
    - Consider indexing eligibility to poverty level? Adjustments of benefit value for inflation?
    - Increases for all recipients and/or targeted to certain populations?
  - *Eligibility, program policies, and administration:* Adjusting eligibility to reach more New Yorkers with benefits and avoid unintended adverse effects of intersecting policies
    - Certain policies currently intersect to create benefit cliffs
    - What policies produce barriers to access / exclusions of certain populations?

# Looking Ahead

## *Next Steps*

# Next Steps – Future Discussions

- **Other Public Benefits policies to discuss:**
  - Are there other public benefits policies or research we should be considering?

# Next Steps – Looking Ahead

- **Next Public Benefits Committee meeting?**
- **Target date for developing recommendations?**
  - 2023 goal: CPRAC to issue progress report
  - 2024 goal: CPRAC committees to develop initial subject-area recommendations

# Closing

# Closing

- **Committee Co-Chairs** – Remarks  
*Barbara Guinn*, NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance  
*Lisa Fitzpatrick*, Human Resources Administration (HRA)  
*Candace Cabral*, Community Member  
*Kathy Connerton*, Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council (REDC)

## Questions? Comments? Feedback?

**Thank you!**

