

Recommendations for the New York State Senate Standing Committee

On Cities 2

December 12, 2023

Westchester Children's Association (WCA)

Oral Testimony

Hello, my name is Allison Lake, and I am the executive director of Westchester Children's association also known as WCA. Our mission is to ensure all children are healthy, safe, and prepared for life's challenges regardless of race or zip code. Thank you so much for the invitation to present to the Cities 2, Committee.

Westchester County is a tale of 2 counties, often perceived as a homogeneous affluent community just north of New York City. It is, however, a county of stark contrasts. Over 20% of households are low income or living in poverty. Many of our "urban" communities experience the all-too-familiar inner-city ills, including disparate graduation rates, unstable housing, food insecurity, unemployment, and poverty. Forty percent of our neighbors live paycheck to paycheck according to United Way's ALICE - Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed indicator and 54.5% of residents are rent burdened , spending more than 30% of household income on rent.

Cities across the state are hurting. And cities in Westchester are no exception following the state pattern with children suffering higher poverty rates compared to the rest of the population.

The 5 cities of Westchester with the largest concentrations of child poverty are Peekskill at 7.6%, White Plains- 13.1%, New Rochelle -14.6%, Mt. Vernon- 21.4% and Yonkers – 17.1%.

Three of our cities, Yonkers, Mt. Vernon, and Peekskill, have Median Income for Families with Children under 18, below the state median of \$88,000.

Two of our cities have some of the highest population densities outside of New York City- with Yonkers at 11,558 people per square mile and the 4.4 miles that make up Mt. Vernon, home to 71,000 people, a density of 16,328 people per square mile. Resources to smaller geographical areas matter and can positively impact more people.

WCA's 2023 *Children by the Numbers data bulletin* released this month shows the particularly stubborn racial inequities of poverty.

80% of children under 18 who are black in Westchester are below the poverty line! 73% for multiracial children. Contrast that with 42% of white children who were below the poverty line.

Systemic racism in housing was noted in your invitation, but similar structural barriers have historically existed in health, education, employment you name it and so we must be bold in our

fight against racism and be sure chosen policies are moving us in the right direction toward that arch of justice and equity.

In addition, we have to acknowledge the raising cost of living for us all, but particularly in a county like Westchester where salaries do not match high expenses. I am on the board of Nonprofit Westchester which has surveyed government contracts that don't offer a livable wage - we need equitable contracts.

Research tells us children living in poverty have lower education outcomes, poorer health – both physical and mental, more contacts with the criminal justice system and limited career opportunities.

The mental health crisis we hear about every day is real and the impact on families is numbing.

According to the US Census, nearly 8 out of 10 adults living in New York's Metro area, in households with children who report often not having enough to eat --- reveal feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge every day.

We can do better by our children and families.

I also stand before you as a member of the Governor's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council. We are researching what works and while we wait for the official models to be run by Urban Institute, we can rely on the incubator that was the Covid Pandemic which showed us putting money in the hands of families lifts them out of poverty. The federal Child Tax Credit is credited with **cutting child poverty by nearly half nationally and in New York State**. Families know best what is needed for their families, and it is not just one thing, we must give them a basket of tools, including:

Robust refundable child tax credits and child allowances, long understood to be among the most effective strategies for reducing child poverty and building family economic security.

housing voucher programs;

nutrition supports including school meals for all children;

continuous Medicaid and CHP coverage for children 0-6;

and livable wages.

There is real urgency to enact legislation that helps our poorest neighbors. As we hear expert testimony today, I ask us all to remember there are **children behind each number**. A mother should not have to decide between buying medicine for her asthmatic child and putting food on the table, as I heard at our data bulletin press conference.

Today, we need policy changes and budget allocations that move the needle for children and families across New York State and I look forward to working with you to make this happen.

Thank you.

INSIDE THIS BULLETIN

Westchester children and youth still face unequal socioeconomic, health, and educational outcomes. However, we can advocate for programs and policies that tackle systemic imbalances, deconstruct barriers and foster inclusive environments for improving the well-being and opportunities of all youth and children regardless of race or ethnic backgrounds.

306,450

children & youth ages 0-24 reside in Westchester

31% of the total population

22% are considered poor or low income



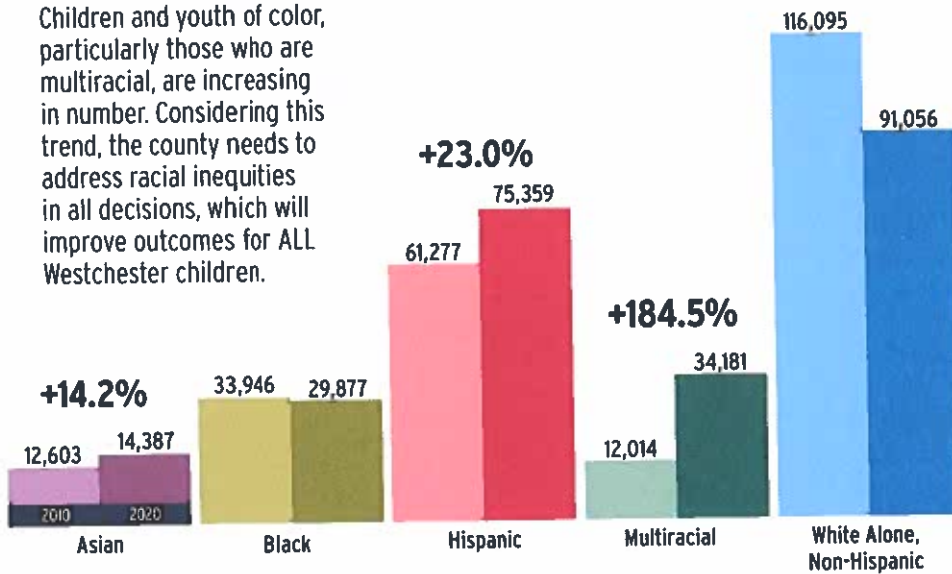
US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 Five Year Estimates, Table S0101. <https://data.census.gov>; US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 Five Year Estimates, Table B17024. <https://data.census.gov>

Shifting Demographics in Westchester's Children and Youth Under Age 18, 2010 vs 2020



What We See

Children and youth of color, particularly those who are multiracial, are increasing in number. Considering this trend, the county needs to address racial inequities in all decisions, which will improve outcomes for ALL Westchester children.



US Census Bureau, 2010 & 2020 Decennial Censuses. Under 18 Population calculated by using the differences in Tables P1 & P3 and Tables P2 & P4

GUIDE TO SYMBOLS



What We See

WCA identified the data patterns and factors that could influence the numbers in the present and future.



Race Inequity

We've highlighted the indicators where there are significant racial disparities.



Local Data

We collected data from Local Community Partners who often provide more current information on the status of children and families in Westchester.

Advocacy & Action



Advocacy & Action

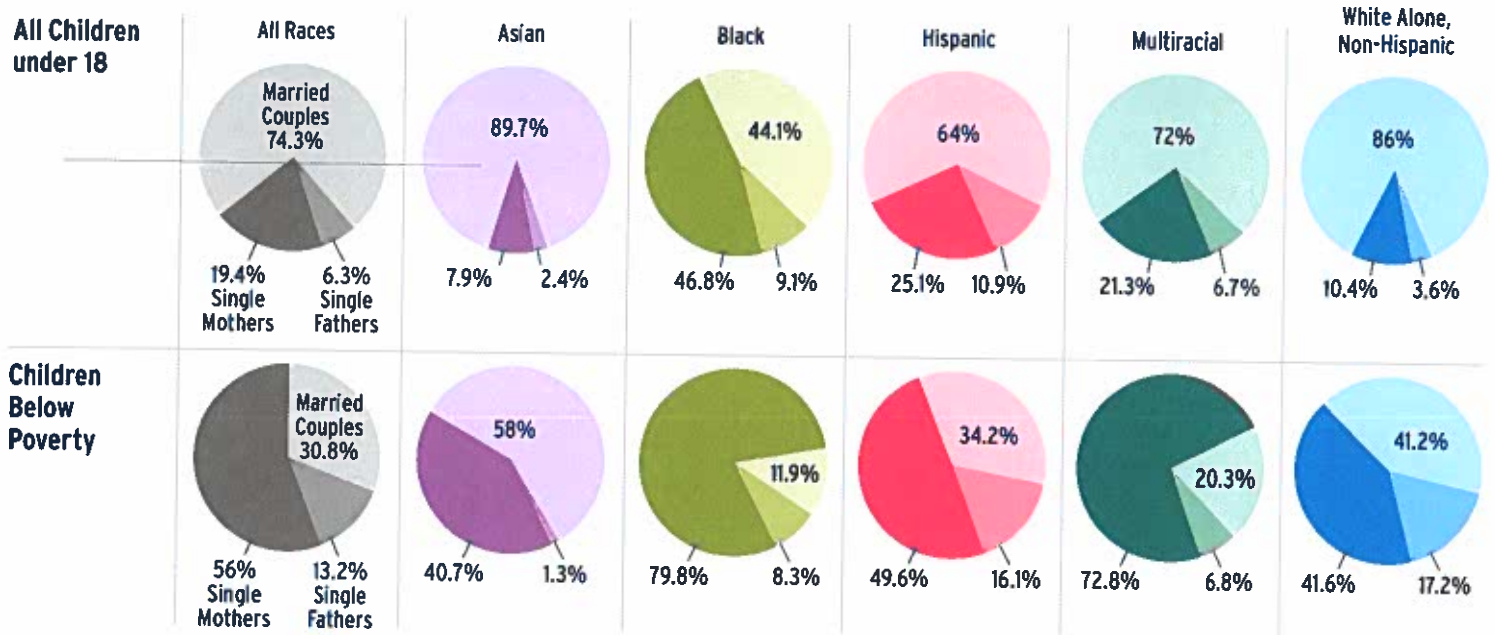
WCA and our community partners are working hard to address poverty and life's challenges from multiple angles. We invite others to join us.

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FAMILY TYPES & INCOME LEVELS

Percentage of Children by Family Types and Race/Ethnicity

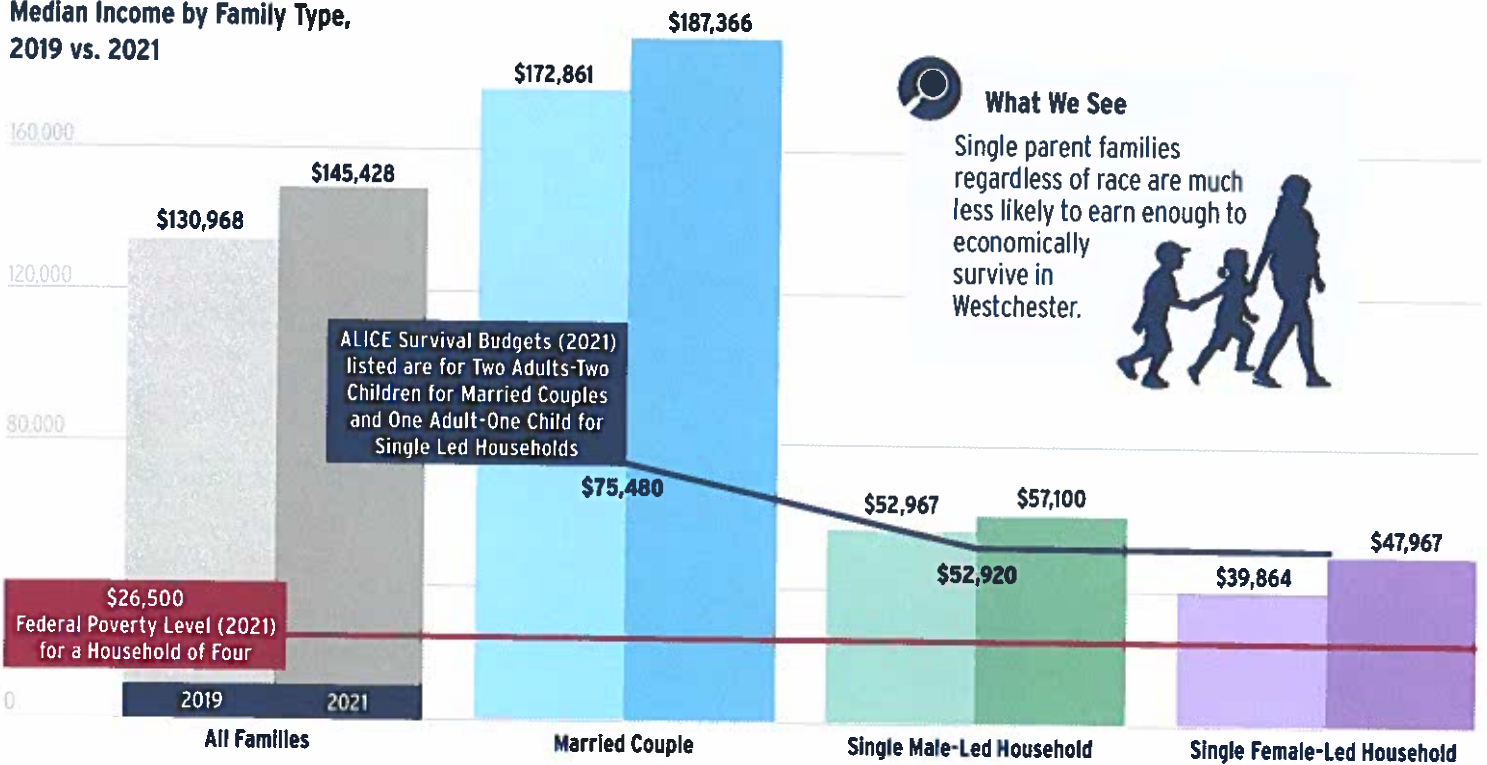


US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 Five Year Estimates, Tables B17010, B17010B, B17010C, B17010D, B17010E, B17010F, B17010G, B17010H, B17010I. <https://data.census.gov> NOTE: Percentages are rounded; pie segments may not total 100%.



What We See Across all races, single parent families are disproportionately represented for children living in poverty. This effect is particularly pronounced for single mother families.

Median Income by Family Type, 2019 vs. 2021



What We See

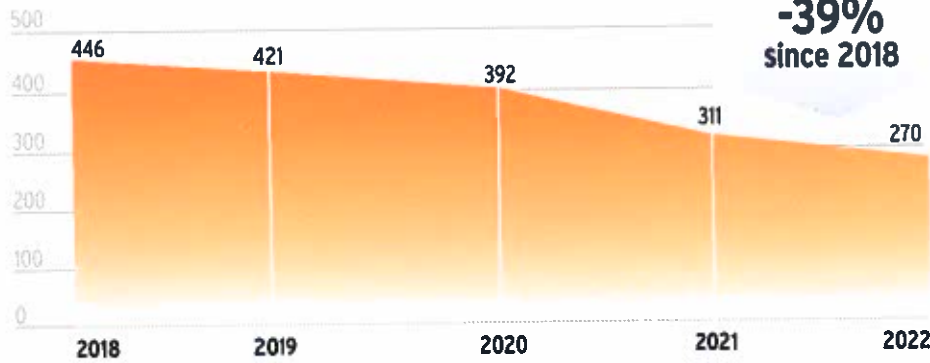
Single parent families regardless of race are much less likely to earn enough to economically survive in Westchester.



US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 Five Year Estimates, Table S0901. <https://data.census.gov>. United Way ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Survival Budget (2021) Westchester County Report. <https://www.unitedwayalice.org/state-over-new-york>

FOSTER CARE

Number of Children in Foster Care, from 2018 to 2022



2022 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles, Westchester County, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, <https://ocfs.ny.gov/reports/maps/>



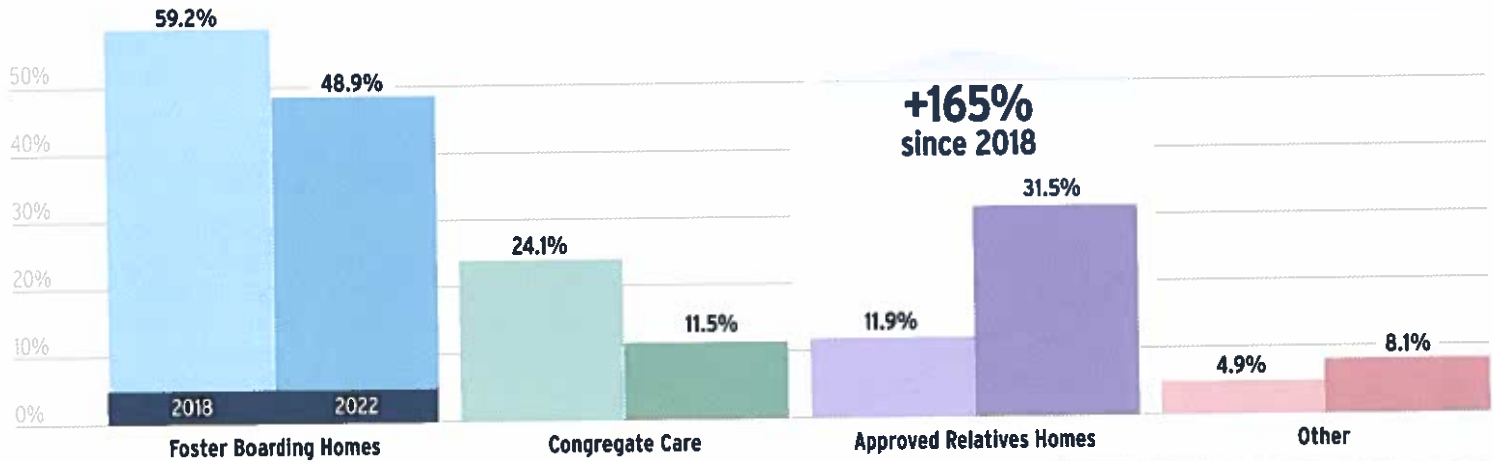
What We See

The number of children in foster care has declined by 39% since 2018.

In addition, the percentage of children placed in approved relative homes as opposed to other non-family options has increased by 165% in the same time period.

This increase reflects Westchester County Department of Social Services efforts to keep families together.

Foster Care Placement by Residential Type, 2018 vs. 2022



2018 and 2022 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles, Westchester County, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, <https://ocfs.ny.gov/reports/maps/>

Children In Foster Care by Race/Ethnicity, 2018 vs. 2022



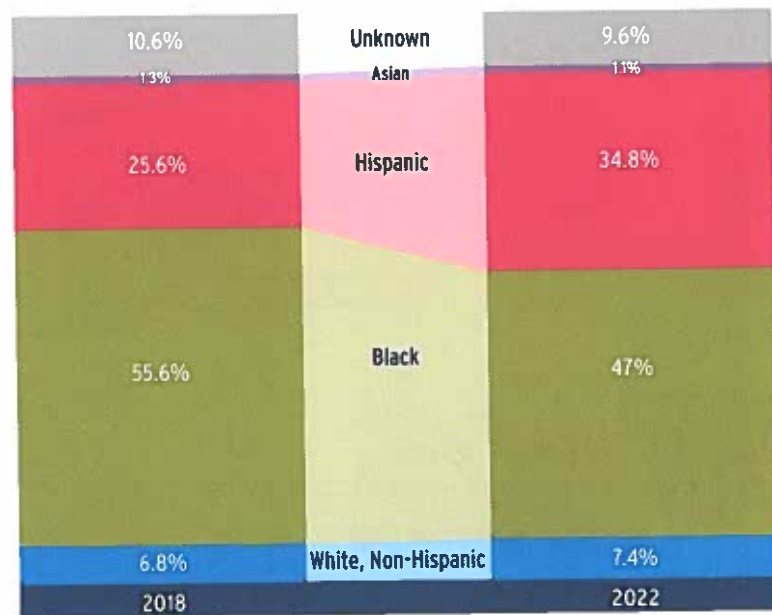
What We See

Consistent, stable, and culturally competent care which recognizes youth's socio-emotional needs is crucial to success of the child welfare system.



Race Inequity

Black and Hispanic Children are still overrepresented in the foster care system. For comparison, Black children represent 14% of the population under 18 and represent 47% of those in foster care.



2018 and 2022 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles, Westchester County, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, <https://ocfs.ny.gov/reports/maps/>

2021 American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates, Table S0901

CHILD WELFARE & HOMELESSNESS



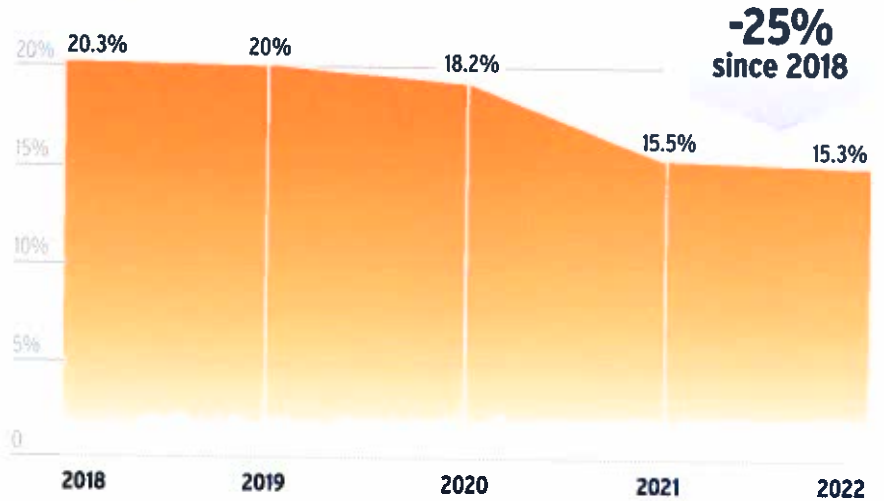
What We See

Child Abuse report rates have gone down. This might be attributed to:

- 1) a higher threshold in child abuse standards implemented in 2022.
- 2) a reduction in reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic while virtual schooling was in place and children's contact with mandated reporters was lessened.

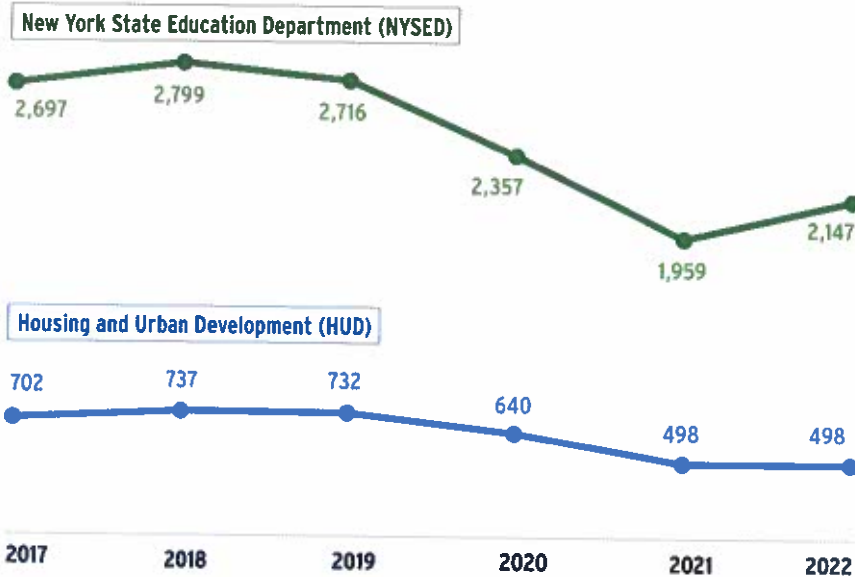
Under the 2018 *Family First Prevention Services Act*, more services, such as *Family Assistance Response (FAR)*, designed to prevent child/family separation, were put in place with the understanding "You don't have to report to support families."

Child Abuse Indication Rate, 2018 to 2022



2022 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles, Westchester County, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, <https://ocfs.ny.gov/reports/maps/>
NOTE: The Indication Report Rate shows the percentage of reports with credible evidence of child abuse or maltreatment.

Number of Homeless Children in Westchester, NYSED vs. HUD from 2017 to 2022



NYSED: New York State Technical and Educational Assistance Center for Homeless Students, Data on Student Homelessness, <https://www.nyslearns.org/data-on-student-homelessness/>; HUD: 2017-2022 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations, Point in Time Counts, <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/>

Advocacy & Action



Advocacy & Action

County Department of Social Services and other service organizations are recognizing some families are involved in the Child Welfare system not because of neglect, but because families are in economic stress.

Westchester County is part of a state *Direct Cash Transfer* pilot program, offering a form of financial assistance for families.



What We See

Unfortunately, conflicting definitions of homelessness continue to be utilized here in Westchester. The Department of Housing and Urban Development's measure indicates a slight decrease in child homelessness, while New York State Education Department reports an increase.

Advocacy & Action

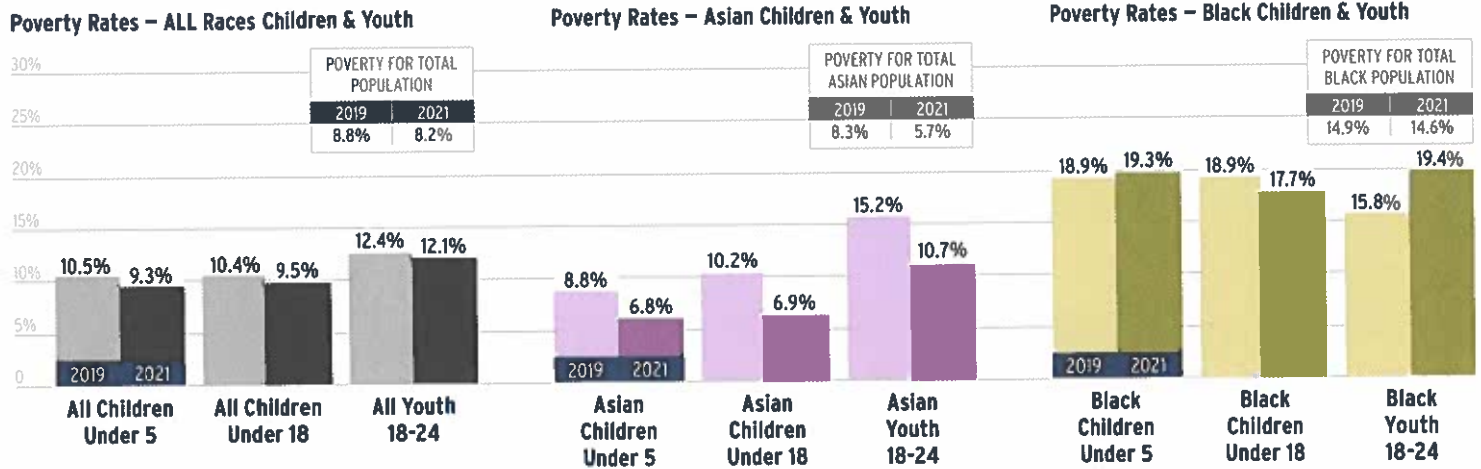


Advocacy & Action

Participants in the *WCA Court Watchers Program* play a pivotal role in addressing child and youth homelessness by monitoring housing disputes, observing evictions and advocating for tenants' rights at Westchester Housing Courts. These efforts, as well as the efforts of our community partners, aim to prevent homelessness. Data collected from our Court Watchers will inform policy reforms aimed at safeguarding affordable housing and connecting vulnerable families to vital support services.

ECONOMIC INSECURITY

Westchester Poverty Rates by Race/Ethnicity 2019 vs 2021



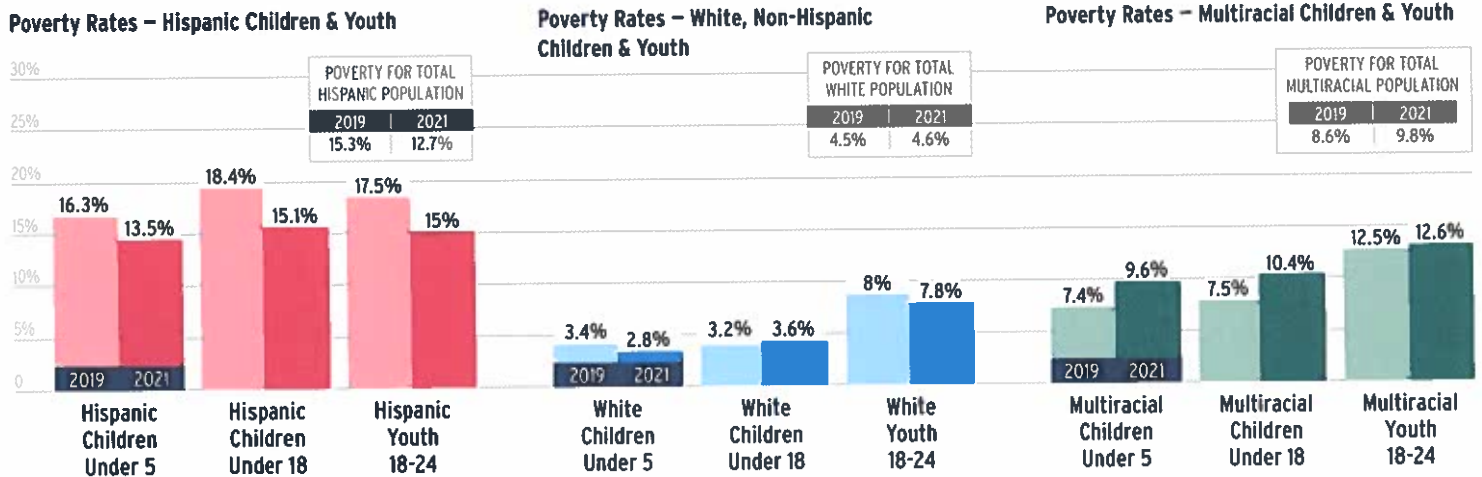
What We See

For many, 2021 poverty rates have declined since 2019. However, we suspect that with the rising cost of living (see page 6), these poverty rates do not provide an accurate portrait of what is going on in 2023.



Race Inequity

All children of color, particularly Black, Hispanic and Multiracial children, experienced higher poverty rates compared to their White counterparts.



US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019 and 2021 5 Year Estimates, Tables B17001, B17001B, B17001D, B1700G, B17001H, B17001L <https://data.census.gov>

Advocacy & Action



New York State Child Poverty Reduction Act recommendations to cut child poverty by 50% in 10 years:

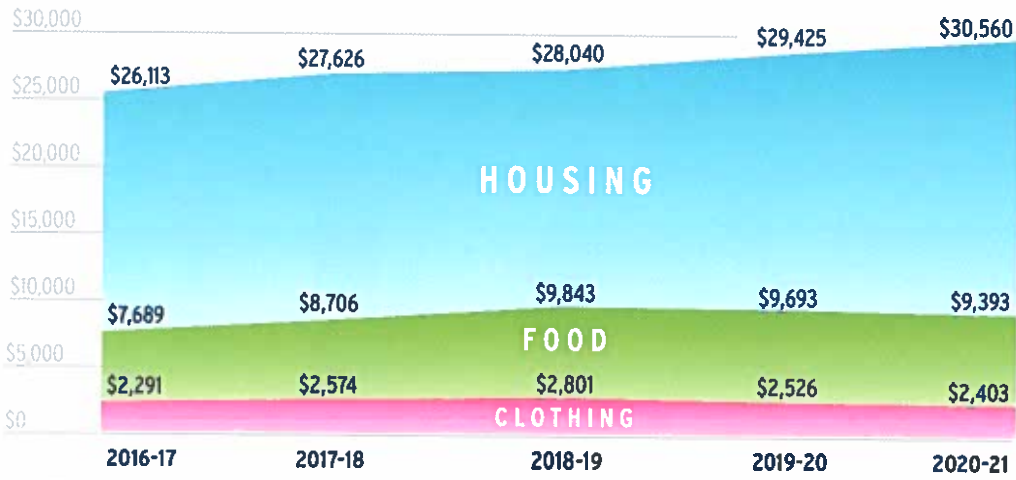
- Deliver tax relief to children in low-income families by strengthening refundable tax credits.
- Fund the *Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP)*.
- Establish and fund statewide, permanent *Healthy School Meals for All*.
- Increase the minimum wage and index it to inflation.
- Provide continuous *Medicaid* funding for children from 0 to age 6.
- Offer child care subsidies that support families with the lowest incomes, especially from historically underserved and immigrant communities.



scan for newyorkcan.org

FAMILIES & THE COST OF LIVING

Changing Annual Cost of Living over Time for New York State Families



What We See

There are often contradictory measures of poverty which become outdated relatively quickly. We have included local data for a better, more current, understanding of family economic struggle.

US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Surveys, Two Year Averages, 2017 - 2021, <https://www.bls.gov/cex/tables/geographic/mean.htm>

Average Monthly Cost of Westchester Child Care 2019 vs. 2023 (Full-time Rates at Child Care Centers)

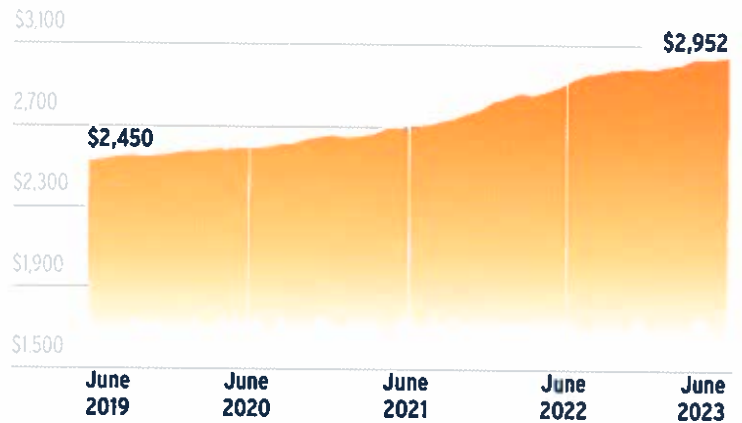
Data provided by



	2019	2023	% Change
Infants (6 Weeks - 18 Months)	\$1,786	\$2,003	12%
Toddlers (19 Months - 35 Months)	\$1,606	\$1,762	10%
Preschoolers (3-5 years old)	\$1,388	\$1,501	8%
School Age (5-12 years old)	\$714	\$999	40%

Child Care Council of Westchester, 2019 & 2023 Westchester County Average Cost of Care Reports

Westchester Market Rental Rates, 2019 to 2023



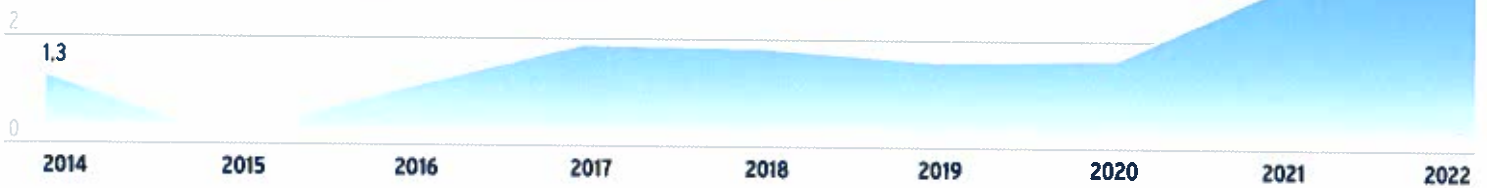
Zillow Observed Rent Index (Smoothed Seasonally Adjusted) All Homes Plus Multifamily Time Series, <https://www.zillow.com/research/data/>

Inflation Rate for the New York Metropolitan Area, 2014 to 2022



What We See

The inflation rate is the rate at which the price of goods and services rise. It is calculated using year-over-year change in the Consumer Price Index. Although 2021 poverty rates have declined compared to 2019, evidence of rising prices and inflation indicate that these rates do not tell the full story.



Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI for All Urban Consumers, Series ID: CUUR522ASA0, <https://data.bls.gov/>

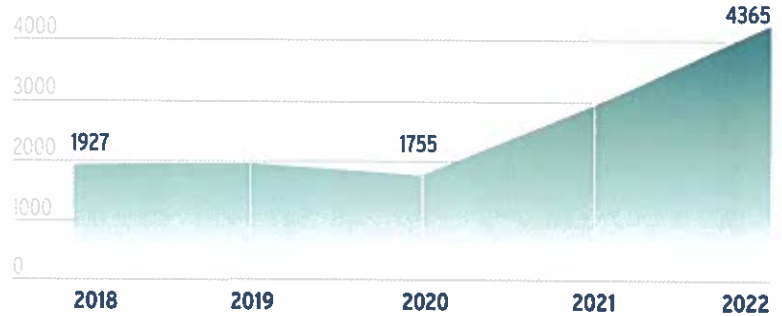
HOW FAMILIES MAKE ENDS MEET

Nearly 8 out of 10 people in the New York Metro Area living in households with children who report often not having enough to eat, reveal feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge nearly every day.



Requests for Free Clothing, 2018 to 2022

Data provided by **The Sharing Shelf**



Sharing Shelf, 2022 Annual Report. <https://online.fliphtml5.com/hopdy/mfmr/Bp-6>

Baby Care Products Distributed throughout Westchester, 2020 to 2022

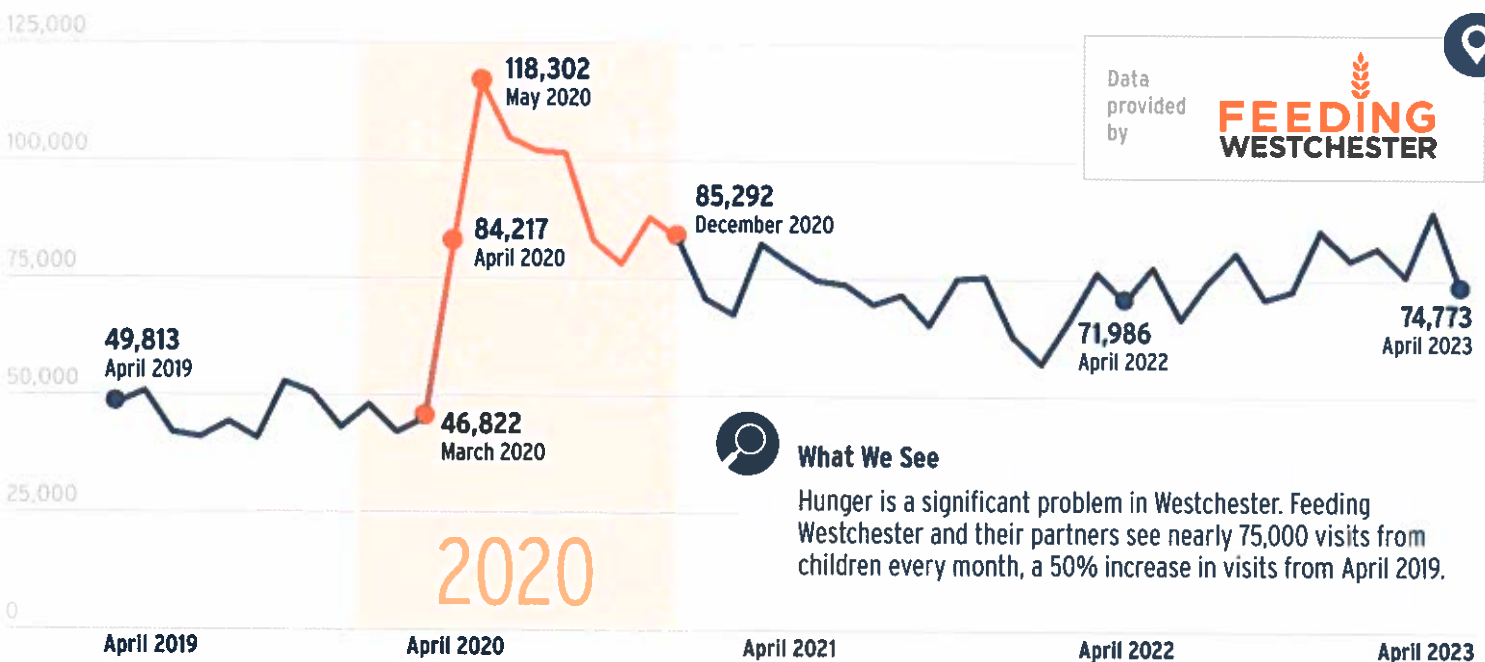
Data provided by **914Cares**

	2020	2021	2022
Diapers	450,313	432,461	531,405
Packages of Wipes	10,695	9,485	12,697
Estimated Number of Babies Served	13,000	12,500	15,000

Data provided by 914Cares

US Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 59 (June 28-July 10, 2023), Food Table 4. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/hhp/hhp59.html> 19, 2023

Children, Ages 0-17, Served at Feeding Westchester Food Pantries, April 2019 to April 2023



Data provided by **FEEDING WESTCHESTER**

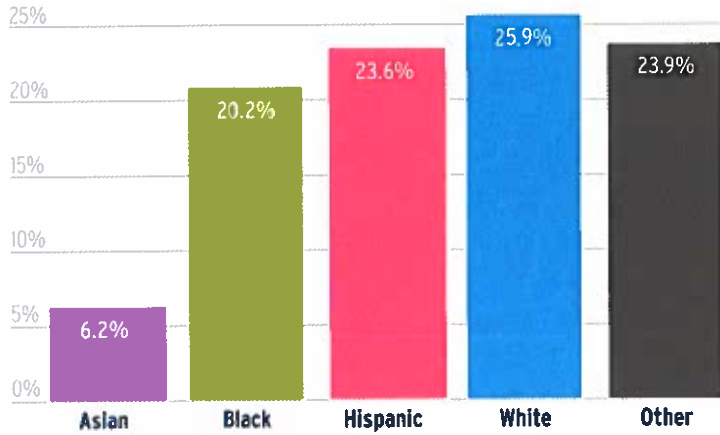
What We See

Hunger is a significant problem in Westchester. Feeding Westchester and their partners see nearly 75,000 visits from children every month, a 50% increase in visits from April 2019.

Data provided by Feeding Westchester

MENTAL HEALTH

New York State Households Reporting One or More Mental, Emotional Developmental or Behavioral Problems by Race/Ethnicity, Two-year average, 2020-2021



2020-21 National Survey of Children's Health, <https://www.childhealthdata.org/>

49%

of U.S. youth ages 6-17 with a mental health disorder did not receive services in a given year.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (2016), <https://nami.org/mhstats>

Advocacy & Action



Advocacy & Action

The continuing economic struggles and the trauma associated with the COVID-19 pandemic adds an additional burden to Westchester's already strained mental health service network. The need for stronger and consistent mental health supports for youth and children is greater than ever. WCA has facilitated ongoing Mental Health Roundtables involving leaders in the non-profit, government and education sectors with the support of the Westchester County Board of Legislators.

In Westchester public schools, we calculated that there is...



ONE
School Psychologist
for every
388 STUDENTS



ONE
Guidance Counselor
for every
315 STUDENTS



ONE
Social Worker
for every
833 STUDENTS

New York State Department of Education, FOIL Request FL-EM-22/1358, October 18, 2022, 2021-22 School Year

Marijuana & Alcohol Use by 10th & 12th Graders, 2021-22 School Year

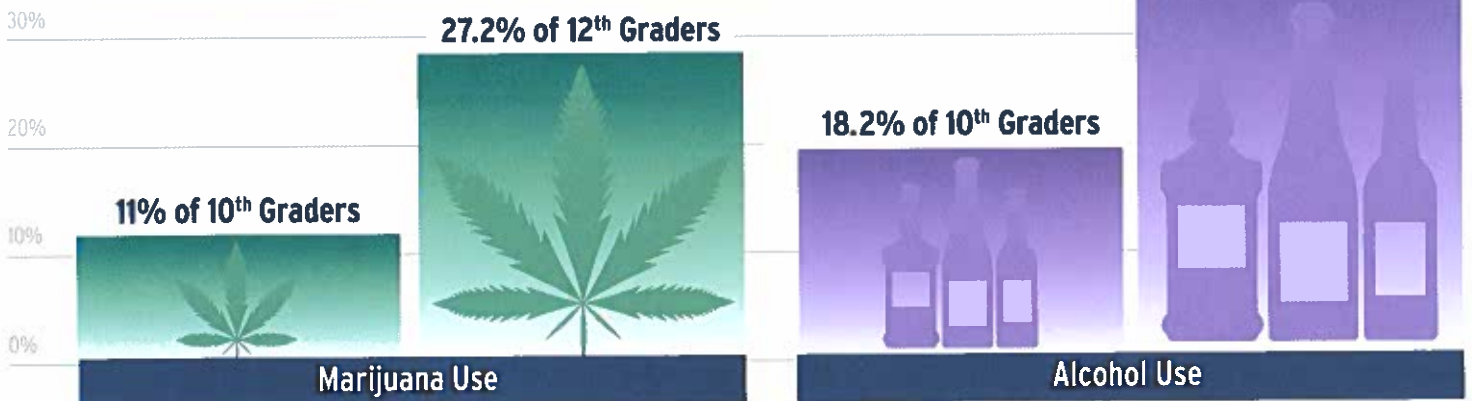
Data provided by

Student Assistance Services, Corp.



What We See

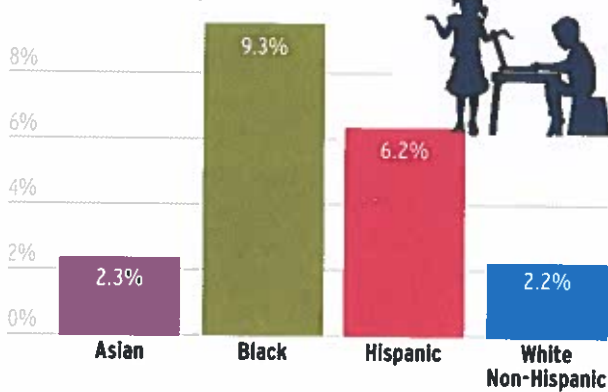
Students were asked "During the past 30 days, did you use [a specified substance]?" Data shows that a greater percentage of 12th graders report marijuana or alcohol use in that period as compared to 10th graders.



Drug-Free Communities Support Program Core Measure Plus Binge Drinking and Vaping, 2021-2022 Survey Student Assistance Services.

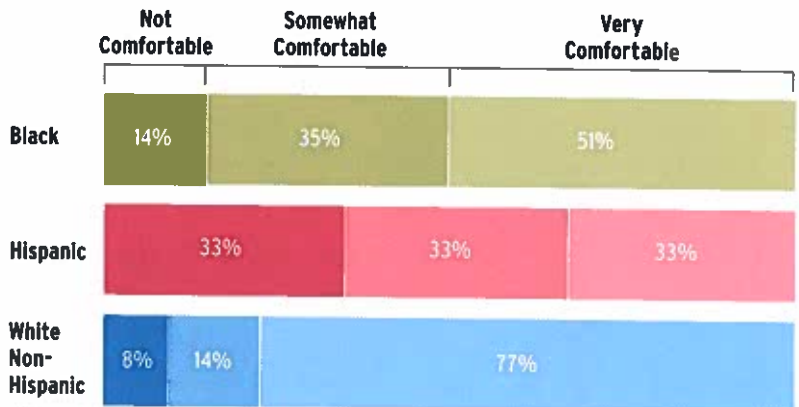
DIGITAL INEQUITY

Households with No Internet Connection by Race/Ethnicity, 2021



US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 Five Year Estimates, Table S2802, <https://data.census.gov>

Degree of Ease in Making an Online Health Appointment, 2022



Sydney Moraitis and Gina Scutelnicu-Todoran, PhD, Pace University, Digital Access Survey, "Perceptions of Parents in the K-12 Schools of Westchester County, New York," 2022, <https://wca4kids.org/download/6272/>



Race Inequity

Lack of internet access and literacy creates barriers that affect children and families. The 2022 Pace University and Westchester Children's Association Survey, identifies a need for digital literacy for low-income and Hispanic families.

Advocacy & Action

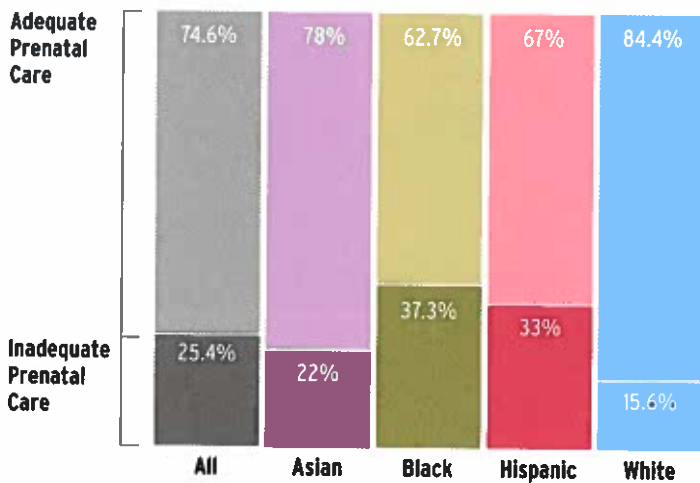


Advocacy & Action

Connect Westchester is a county-wide collaboration committed to digital equity and inclusion.

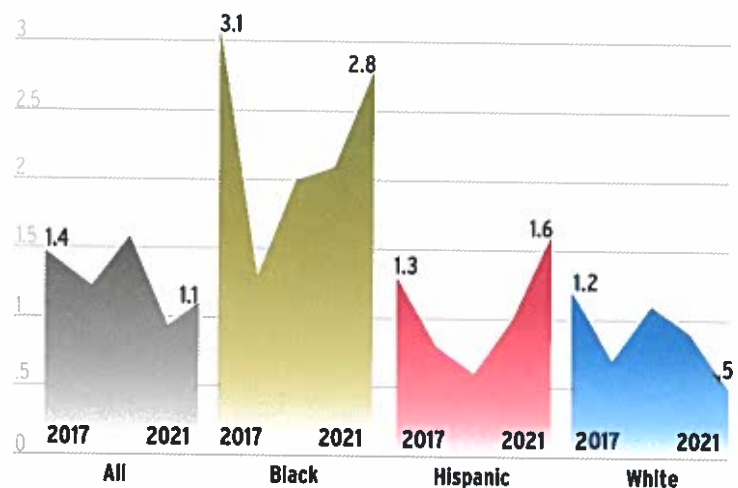
HEALTH INEQUITY

Percent of Mothers Receiving Inadequate Prenatal Care, by Race/Ethnicity, Three Year Average, 2018-2020



NYS Department of Health, Westchester County Health Indicators by Race/Ethnicity, <https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/community/minority/county/westchester.htm>
NOTE: "inadequate" care is defined as either starting prenatal care after the 4th month of pregnancy or receiving less than 50% of expected visits based on the schedule of prenatal care visits recommended by American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).

Infant Mortality Rate per 1,000 Births, by Race/Ethnicity, 2017 to 2021



Westchester County Community Health Assessment 2022-2024, Supplemental Data Report II, Vital Statistics, <https://health.westchestergov.com/images/stories/Data-Stats/chavalstats2023.pdf>, p. 32



Race Inequity

Black maternal and infant health outcomes remain stubbornly behind other races and ethnicities, impacting overall well-being. In 2021, Black infants were 5x more likely to die than White infants. Hispanic infants were 3x more likely to die than white infants.

Advocacy & Action

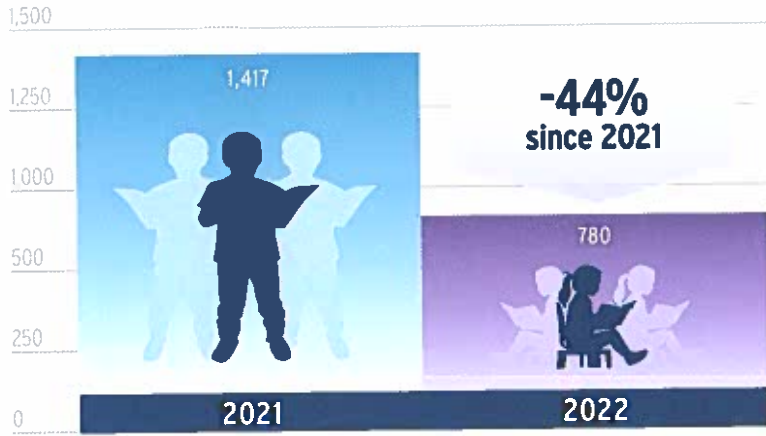


Advocacy & Action

Westchester County's *Black Maternal Child Health Initiative* is championed by Sister to Sister International and other community partners. Their goal is to improve Black maternal and child health outcomes, reduce racial healthcare inequities, and create lasting partnerships focused on ensuring successful birthing practices.

EDUCATION

Children Enrolled in Head Start, 2021 vs. 2022



US Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center Agency Service Profiles for Family Services of Westchester & WestCOP. <https://hses.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>



What We See

Head Start is a federally funded early childhood development program with long-term outcomes that improve school readiness, social-emotional wellbeing, and parental support.

Westchester's *Head Start* slots have significantly declined post-pandemic. In the span of a year, the number of children enrolled in *Head Start* declined by 44%.

WCA continues to investigate county-wide changes in providers, participation, and enrollment in *Universal Pre-K* programs. We advocate for equitable access to *Head Start*, *Home Visiting* and other early childhood resources.



Race Inequity

Disproportionate school suspensions persist among Black and Hispanic students.

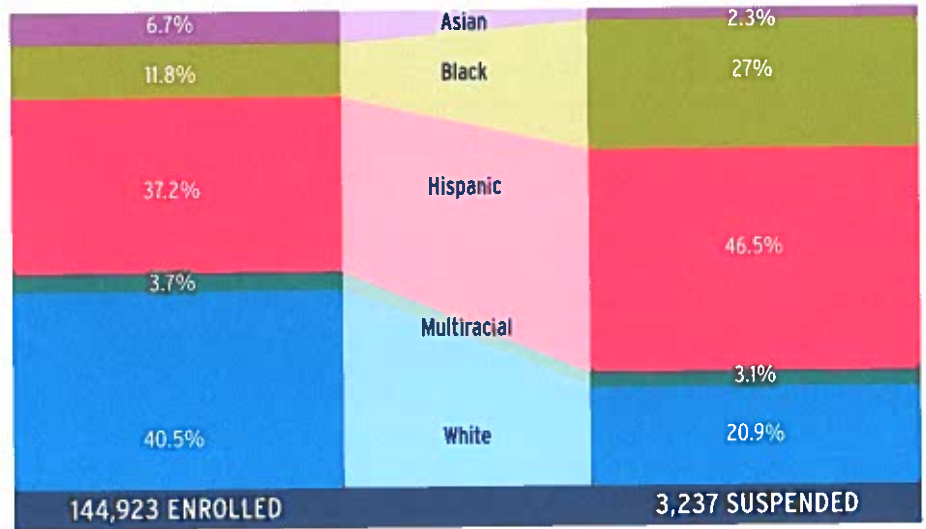
Advocacy & Action



Advocacy & Action

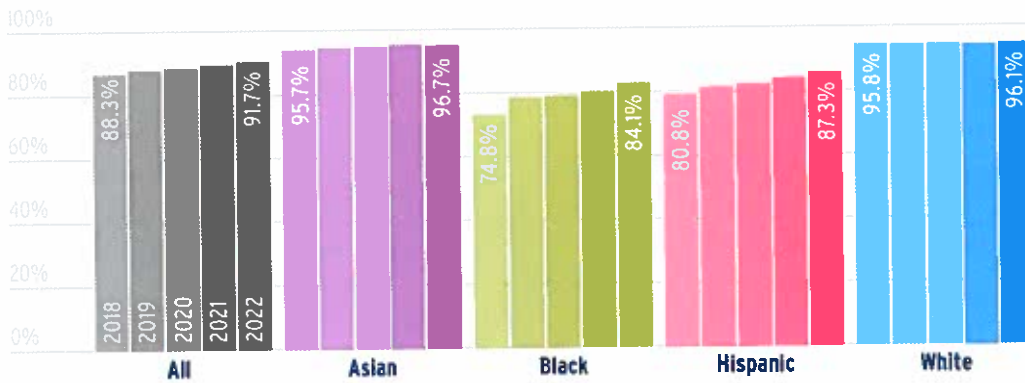
Fight to pass the *Solutions Not Suspensions Bill* which aims to prioritize alternative approaches to discipline and conflict resolution in educational settings, focusing on strategies that support student learning and well-being instead of resorting to suspensions.

Suspended Students by Race/Ethnicity, Pre-K through Grade 12, 2021-22



New York State Department of Education. FOIL Request FL-EM-2335. Downloaded July 29, 2023
NOTE: Enrollment Count represents unduplicated count of students enrolled during the school year.

High School Graduation Rates by Race, 2018-2022



New York State Department of Education, Graduation Rate Databases (various years). <https://data.nysed.gov/downloads.php>
NOTE: Four Year Graduation Rates are as of August of the Graduation Year

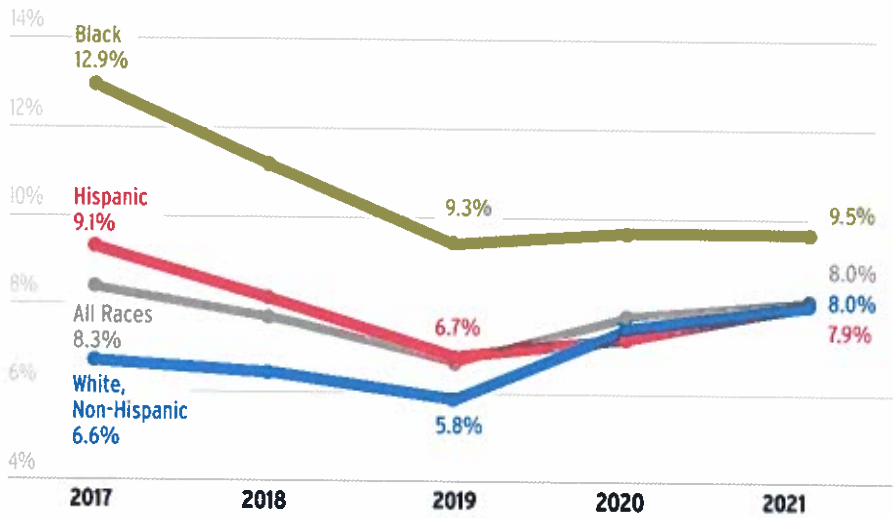


Racial Inequity

Despite Black high school students continuing to experience below-average graduation rates, they showed the most improvement among all racial subgroups from 2018 to 2022.

CHALLENGES FACING YOUTH

Unemployment Rate by Race/Ethnicity, Ages 16-24, 2017 to 2021



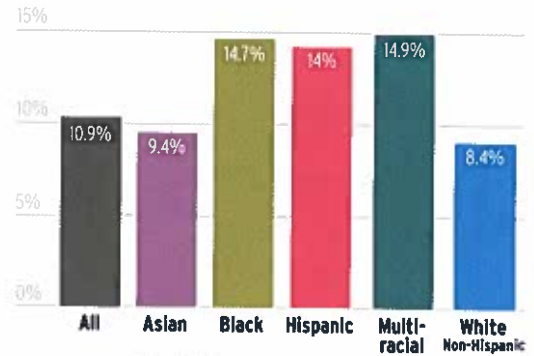
US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates, Calculated using Public Use Microdata Sample Set, Vintages 2017 through 2021, <https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/>

Disconnected Youth by Race/Ethnicity, 2021



What We See

'Disconnected youth' are neither working nor in school. More than 10% of youth ages 16-24 fall into this category.



US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates, Calculated using Public Use Microdata Sample Set, Vintages 2021, <https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/>



Race Inequity

Raise the Age (RTA) legislation enacted in 2017 is working. Arrests of youth under 18 continue to decrease, with exception of a slight increase after the COVID-19 pandemic. However the disproportionality of Black and Hispanic youngsters in the justice system still exists.

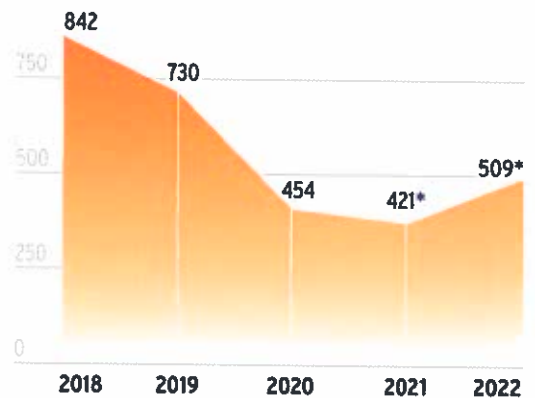
Advocacy & Action



Advocacy & Action

- Keep young people connected to school, work and community.
- Continue to support *RTA* implementation with additional funding for community-based organizations with strongest ties to youth and families.
- Pass the *Youth Justice & Opportunities Act, Right 2 Remain Silent* and other reforms.

Westchester County Arrests Involving Youth Under 18, 2018 to 2022

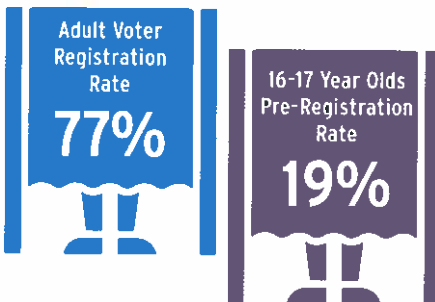


NY Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), Under Juvenile Arrest/Criminal Activity by County, 2018-2022 & Yonkers Police District. (Email Request)

*At time of publication, 2021 and 2022 Yonkers Data were not officially published by NY DCJS. As a result, 2021 and 2022 county totals do not match official numbers

ENGAGING YOUTH

Voter Registration Rates



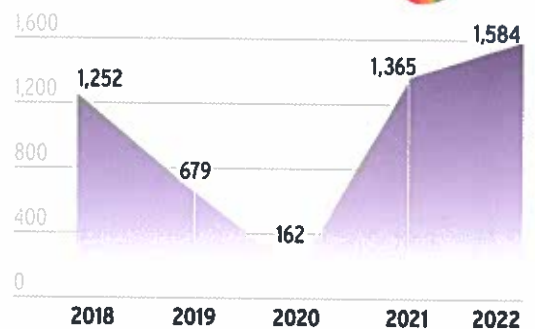
New York State Board of Elections, NYSVOTER Statewide Voter Database as of March 2023. Rates calculated by extracting population estimates from US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates, Calculated using Public Use Microdata Sample Set, Vintages 2021, <https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/>



What We See

Evidence suggests that youth are growing more engaged in issue-specific social movements. Youth activities can include attending trainings, signing petitions, and rallying for a cause. Civic engagement can also be reflected in voter registration status and turnout which needs improvement.

LGBTQIA+ Youth in Empowerment Trainings, 2018 to 2022



Data provided by Center Lane, Westchester Jewish Community Services

WE WANT TO KNOW...

What Does Advocacy Mean to You?

To capture the voices of youth, we partnered with the White Plains Youth Bureau to better understand what advocacy meant to the youth involved in their summer employment program. These are their unedited responses.



It means to stand up for your truth.

Standing up for those whose needing support.

A movement, someone who does something right for something that is wrong.

To me advocacy means to speak up or support someone who can't do that for themselves.

Advocacy to me means to make aware, promote, speak up against issues.

Being accountable for yourself and others.

Advocacy means wanting to make a change and speaking out to fix a problem.

I think advocacy means to stand up for and fight for what you believe is right.

What advocacy means to me is to inform about issues surrounding our community and bringing in support for it.



Our Vision: Every child healthy, safe, and prepared for life's challenges regardless of race or zip code.

Westchester Children's Association focuses on key issues that affect the most vulnerable young people in Westchester County.

We identify current needs by analyzing data, hearing directly from youth and families, and working closely with public and nonprofit service providers.

We use that data to inform a conversation with the public, policymakers, and child service providers that eventually evolves into consensus about what children need.

We work to mobilize parents, youth, and other concerned residents to push for changes that make things better for kids!

Will you join us? Together, we can advocate for sensible public investments and effective solutions that will set all of our children up for success.

Sign up to receive updates about WCA's child advocacy, events, and other ways to get involved at wca4kids.org/signup.

Support us with a donation at wca4kids.org/donate.

For more data, details and discussion visit wca4kids.org.

**WESTCHESTER
CHILDREN'S
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Children's Champions Since 1914

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Our data is powered by

