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YOUTH & FAMILY NEWS

FILED 7/21/2023 11:14AM

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New York Tests Cash Assistance for Families Involved with CPS

First-of-its-kind pilot program will pay a monthly stipend to 150 families for one year and study the impact on future interactions with CPS.

BY [AYA DIAB](#)



Illustration by Christine Ongjoco.

The New York state agency that oversees child welfare is launching a groundbreaking pilot program to provide cash assistance to certain families who have been reported to CPS for poverty-related child neglect. Through the new program, 150 families across three counties will receive \$500 per month for a year starting this July. The pilot was launched by the Office of Children and Family Services in partnership with a leading national research institute focused on cash transfer programs.

The purpose of the program, agency officials say, will be to determine how universal cash stipends affect families' future contact with the child welfare system.

A growing body of studies has suggested financial support for struggling families can help reduce CPS caseloads, but the pilot's contributors say this is the first government-run assistance program in the country specifically designed to study its impact on CPS-involved families.

Suzanne Miles-Gustave, the acting commissioner of Children and Family Services, has called the new program a bold step toward helping low-income families with children.



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“For far too long, the child welfare system focused on a caregiver’s perceived deficits, often punishing them for simply lacking adequate resources.” Miles-Gustave said in a [press release](#). “This program does much more than provide a monthly stipend; it helps ensure financial stability. By lifting such a heavy burden, families will feel less strain and have new-found independence to meet their needs, two key factors that encourage a nurturing environment essential for a child’s well-being and overall family strength.”

This pilot will be evaluated by the Center for Guaranteed Income Research at the University of Pennsylvania. The center is one of the leading national authorities on evaluating such programs — including the now well-known “universal basic income” experiment launched

by the city of Stockton, California, in 2019. That program provided cash assistance to residents chosen at random; this pilot in New York will be the first time the Penn center has evaluated cash transfers for families under CPS investigation.

“We know that so many families who are reported to the child welfare system are experiencing needs related to poverty, and yet the services offered often don’t address poverty,” said Allison Thompson, executive director at the research center.

Advocates have long argued that neglect is too often confused with poverty, and that the child welfare system is not suited to address poverty-related concerns about child well-being and safety.

“FOR FAR TOO LONG, THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM FOCUSED ON A CAREGIVER’S PERCEIVED DEFICITS, OFTEN PUNISHING THEM FOR SIMPLY LACKING ADEQUATE RESOURCES.”

— SUZANNE MILES-GUSTAVE, OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

According to a [report](#) from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being, roughly 85% of families investigated by CPS have incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line.

“The services offered by child welfare systems tend to be deficit-focused and usually center around costly case management services, or behavioral modification programming,” Thompson said, “when we know families need our resources to address poverty.”

Youth Research Incorporated is an organization that works with the state child welfare agency and will also be involved in the pilot program, supplying teams to support the families selected to receive the cash transfer.

“Youth Research Incorporated is excited to serve as the pilot administrator in this one-of-a-kind demonstration project,” Cassie Pustilnik, the group’s executive director, said in the press release. “This project is a perfect example of how our partnership supports those critical priorities.”

For families to participate in the pilot program, they must have interacted with child protective services, but there is no safety concern for the child or the family.

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Similar pilot programs have been implemented in the past. In [December](#) 2021, South San Francisco sent \$500 monthly checks to 150 low-income families to spend on whatever they chose. A [study](#) by the University of Pennsylvania found that recipients of the monthly \$500 payment experienced less fluctuation in their monthly income, and are able to pay down debt at higher rates than the control group..

In [May](#), a nonprofit in Washington, D.C., launched a guaranteed income pilot program for low-income single Black mothers, with the aim of preventing further involvement with child protective services. New York's pilot program, in contrast, will be government-run with no restrictions on race.

“The underlying assumptions are not that we need to monitor families,” Thompson said, “but that we need to trust families and believe that they know what they need.”

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