Hearing airs child poverty struggles

Residents share their experiences with panel

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New York State's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council held a public hearing on Aug. 4 to present their antipoverty efforts and to hear experiences and suggestions from New Yorkers.

Barbara Guinn, commissioner of the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, said the purpose of the hearings is to get out into the community and receive feedback on their existing services.

"It's really important that we make sure that those who are eligible know about the benefits and they receive them," Guinn said.

Some of the council's recommendations to decrease child poverty include creating a state housing voucher program similar to Section 8, increasing New York's child tax credit to $1,500 and establishing a state food benefit similar to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

With these recommendations, the council hopes to decrease child poverty by 50%.

Tianna Johnson, a longtime advocate for the Children's Agenda, attended the public hearing and spoke from her own experience about the available benefits and programs.



New York State's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council held a public hearing on Aug. 4 to gather feedback on their efforts to decrease child poverty. KERRIA WEAVER/DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

"Having access to the programs and the changes, the child tax credit, the housing vouchers, the public assistance and everything that CPRAC is bringing to the state ultimately equates to an enhanced quality of life," Johnson said. "As a legally disabled Black single mother, the disparities in societal supports and opportunities here in Monroe County and across the state are staggering."

Sam Moskowitz, director of shelter services at Volunteers of America, said he has worked with shelters and housing for the past decade and has witnessed a troubling pattern.

"It is harder to afford and live in Rochester. We're no longer a city set up for the working class," Moskowitz said. "Many assume that families with children become homeless because they are lazy, on drugs or bad parents; this is not the case. 100% of our children are enrolled in school and over 60% of

our parents work. Many of our families become homeless due to situations out of their control."

Following the public hearings across the state, the council plans to collect the information and see what changes they can make to their recommendations on decreasing child poverty. The council will also continue holding opportunities to hear people's experience with accessing different programs.

Kerria Weaver works as the Government and You reporter for the Democrat and Chronicle, with a focus on how government actions affect communities and neighborhoods.

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