

2026 POLICY AGENDA

Driving Policy Solutions that Strengthen Economic Security for Families and Children



STRENGTHEN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Prioritize the Early Childhood Endowment, eliminate the Care4Kids waitlist, raise 0–3 rates, and implement prenatal-to-three developmental screening to stabilize providers and ensure families can access affordable, high-quality early care and education.

ESTABLISH THE CT CHILD TAX CREDIT

Enact a permanent, refundable \$600-per-child CT Child Tax Credit to provide flexible, reliable income for 250,000 households, including 350,000+ children -- helping working families manage the cost of raising children while strengthening the state economy with an estimated \$414M in annual economic output.

SECURE NO-COST SCHOOL MEALS

Provide free lunch for reduced-price-eligible students and free breakfast for all to reduce food insecurity and ensure every student has the nutrition they need to learn and thrive.

ADVANCE EQUITABLE SCHOOL FUNDING

Index the ECS foundation to inflation to fully fund schools and prevent cuts or added local tax burdens.

PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Ease benefit cliffs in Care4Kids, TANF, and SNAP with phased transitions and hold-harmless protections, and safeguard SNAP, WIC, and health care through state action and emergency funding to help families maintain stable access to essential programs and break the cycle of poverty.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

BEYOND OUR IMMEDIATE LEGISLATIVE GOALS, WE ARE COLLABORATING CLOSELY WITH PARTNERS AND COMMUNITIES TO ADDRESS THESE CRITICAL ISSUES

- 1 Early Care and Education:** Strengthen, stabilize and grow the childcare sector to improve equitable access for families, improve quality of care and workforce pathways, and bolster economic stability for all licensed family child care and center-based providers.
- 2 Education and Workforce Development:** Invest in K–12 education, workforce pathways, and Community Schools to ensure all youth are engaged, supported, and prepared for success in Connecticut's evolving economy.
- 3 Health, Food and Nutrition Security:** Protect and strengthen healthcare and food and nutrition programs and policies that provide relief now and build a thriving, resilient future.
- 4 Economic Mobility:** Promote fair and affordable housing, high-road jobs, lower utility costs, and tax relief for ALICE families and individuals.

United Way Coastal and Western Connecticut works to stabilize households by meeting urgent basic needs while advancing long-term, equitable systems change. With 42% of households living at or below the **ALICE** (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) **threshold**, our policy agenda prioritizes solutions that strengthen economic security, improve health outcomes, and expand educational opportunity. Through advocacy, collective impact, and targeted investments, we focus on both immediate relief and structural reforms that address root causes. Our goal is a region where every person has the opportunity to thrive.

CORA'S KIDS FAMILY CHILD CARE INITIATIVE

2026 Request: \$475,000 in state investment to fully fund Greater Danbury's **only** Family Child Care Network

GREATER DANBURY CHILD CARE IS FRAGILE AND UNSUSTAINABLE

Greater Danbury is home to nearly **3,000 children ages 0 to 5**, yet the supply of child care falls well short of demand. Available slots are often unaffordable or do not align with the nontraditional hours many working families need. Staffing shortages, rising costs, and provider burnout continue to destabilize the system, with the most acute gaps in infant, toddler, and off-hours care.

Without intervention:

- Families lose access to care
- Parents reduce work hours or leave the workforce, and
- The region's economic stability suffers.

Reliable child care is workforce infrastructure. When families cannot find affordable care, parents reduce hours or leave jobs, businesses struggle to hire, and the region's economy slows.

CORA'S KIDS IS AN INDISPENSIBLE PIECE OF THE CHILD CARE INFRASTRUCTURE

Cora's Kids expands equitable access to affordable care while developing a stronger workforce and local business community. Through hands-on technical and access to capital assistance, credential preparation, business coaching, and culturally responsive support, Cora's Kids starts and sustains high-quality family child care across Greater Danbury and New Milford.



MODEST INVESTMENT WITH TRANSFORMATIVE RETURNS

Eight years of proven implementation and trusted partnerships across Danbury

Cora's Kids Budget	\$475,000 annually
Cost Per Provider (excluding substitutes, assistants)	\$2,879 annually
Cost Per Child	\$475 annually

State funding supports coaching, licensing support, and training that sustain 165 providers, 170 community messengers, and 1,000 child care slots.

OUR FOCUS IN 2026

- Open 15 new licensed Family Child Care businesses, totaling of 165+ family child care providers
- Create 90 new affordable, high-quality child care slots, serving 1,000 children
- Support 15 experienced providers through individualized coaching
- Guide 25 providers through Child Development Associate, National Association of Family Child Care accreditations
- Deliver 40 hours of professional development
- Train 20 Community Messengers to connect families to licensed care and resources

WHAT HAPPENS IF THIS WORK IS NOT FUNDED?

Providers close or go unlicensed
Families lose subsidized care
Parents leave the workforce
Regional child care supply shrinks