



2025 ANNUAL REPORT



*Giving Every
Child A Chance®*

Dear Friend:

This year, ACNJ has expanded partnerships and deepened our commitment to elevating the voices of parents, youth, and child care providers. With greater intentionality, we relied on families' lived experiences to shape advocacy and ensure their priorities stay front and center when lawmakers advance policy solutions. Through *Strolling Thunder* meetings, town halls, webinars, petitions, videos, events, and social media, we connected parents and providers directly with policymakers to drive change.

These efforts reflect ACNJ's core strength — translating complex policy issues into clear, actionable information that empowers communities and decision-makers.

For example, Medicaid, which funds NJ FamilyCare, provides health coverage to nearly one in five New Jersey residents. This vital program also supports key initiatives such as the Special Education Medicaid Initiative (SEMI) and behavioral health services through the NJ Children's System of Care. When federal changes to Medicaid threatened to disrupt these supports, ACNJ provided clear, accessible information to help communities and policymakers understand the impact. Our #MedicaidMatters campaign mobilized more than 2,400 New Jerseyans, whose signatures were shared with our congressional delegation to protect these essential services.

Calls to our KidLaw Resource Center reached record numbers this year. To meet the need, more than 40 attorneys from Audible and Amazon volunteered their time to help equip parents and professionals with the information needed to ensure that no student falls

through the cracks. This spirit of partnership and problem-solving also drives our broader advocacy to strengthen the systems that support children and families. While challenges remain, they create opportunities to rethink how New Jersey supports families — especially through child care.

Child care isn't just a family issue; it's an economic imperative. Parents need reliable care to stay in the workforce, and businesses depend on it to thrive. Like roads, schools, and bridges, child care is essential infrastructure. Together with our partners, ACNJ continues to educate policymakers about the "workforce behind the workforce" — the educators who provide quality early learning every day. Through our #NJVotes4Kids campaign, coalition members, providers, and parents raised their voices to ensure child care remained a priority in the gubernatorial campaigns.

Our advocacy is only possible because of your support. As New Jersey's leading independent voice for children, ACNJ remains steadfast in its mission to ensure every child grows up safe, healthy, and educated. On behalf of the ACNJ staff and Board of Trustees, thank you for your partnership and for lending your voice to create brighter futures for children across the Garden State.



Mary Coogan, Esq.
President & CEO



Jennifer Robinson, Ed.D.
Chair, Board of Trustees

ACNJ'S 10TH ANNUAL BREAKFAST CELEBRATION

8:00 AM DECEMBER 4, 2025 AT THE CLUBHOUSE
AT GALLOPING HILL GOLF COURSE, KENILWORTH, NJ

Stronger Starts: Advancing Maternal and Infant Health in New Jersey

This year's program will explore racial disparities in maternal and infant health and highlight New Jersey-led programs, policy wins, and goals to improve outcomes for mothers and babies.



MODERATOR:
Atiya Weiss
Executive Director
of The Burke Foundation



PANELIST:
Dr. Nastassia K. Harris
Founding Executive Director of the
Perinatal Equity Health Initiative



PANELIST:
Lisa Asare
President and Chief Executive Officer
of the NJ Maternal and Infant Health
Innovation Authority



**Purchase Tickets/
Become a Sponsor**

WELCOMING NEW VOICES — HONORING LASTING LEGACIES

We are excited to welcome four distinguished leaders to ACNJ's Board of Trustees. Their expertise and dedication to children and families will strengthen our mission and broaden our impact.

We are grateful for their commitment and look forward to the unique perspectives and leadership they bring to ACNJ.



Bianka Douglas
Vice President
Group Insurance Lead
HR Business Partner,
Prudential Financial



Erik Juan Jose Estrada, M.P.A., M.S.P.A.
Community Manager
Community Foundation
of South Jersey



Julie Gallanty, Ed.D.
Chief Executive Officer
New Jersey YMCA
State Alliance



Mark Y. Moon, Esq.
Partner
Trenk Isabel Siddiqi &
Shahdanian P.C.



We are deeply grateful to Dr. Vito Gagliardi, Dr. Monica Lallo, Dr. Kendell Sprott, and Richard Trenk, Esq. for their leadership, commitment, and years of service to ACNJ's mission. Their contributions have strengthened our advocacy and impact for New Jersey's children, leaving an enduring mark. We celebrate their service and wish them all the best in the years ahead.

Vito Gagliardi, Ed.D. – Drawing on experience at every level of education – as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and DOE Commissioner – Dr. Gagliardi brought comprehensive insight into systemic challenges and championed policies that improved educational opportunities, especially for students with special needs. (Middle photo)

Monica Lallo, Ed.D., M.P.M., M.P.A. – During her tenure on the Board, Dr. Lallo worked to improve outcomes for underserved youth. A member of the Race Equity Task Force, she committed to bridging socioeconomic divides by recommending a range of resources and helping expand ACNJ's engagement in South Jersey. (Top photo, second from left)

Kendell Sprott, M.D., J.D. – Physician, lawyer, and ACNJ board member for over 20 years, Dr. Sprott advocated for broadening the organization's focus to early education, improving health outcomes for children, and highlighting systemic disparities among low-income families. (Top photo, third from left)

Richard Trenk, Esq. – Longtime board member and former Board Chair, Mr. Trenk helped launch ACNJ's annual breakfast (now in its tenth year), strengthen board development, and advance programs like our annual Kids Count reports and Breakfast After the Bell. (Bottom photo)



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with ACNJ?



www.acnj.org



@ACNJForKids

Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) has been the trusted, independent voice that has prioritized children's needs for over 45 years. ACNJ's mission is to advance and strengthen policies and programs that promote equitable opportunities for all New Jersey children and youth.

Our work results in:

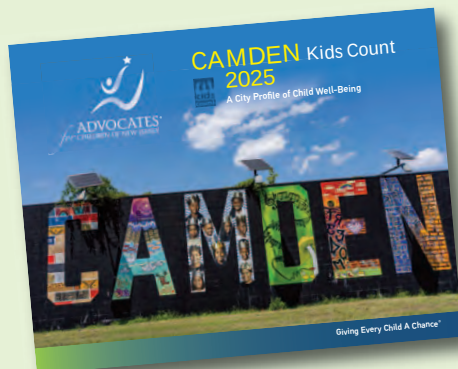
- better laws and policies,
- more effective funding, and
- stronger services for children and families.

*This means more children are given the chance to grow up **safe, healthy, and educated.***

Measuring How Well New Jersey's Children are Faring



ACNJ continues to shine a spotlight on child well-being with its *New Jersey County Pocket Guide 2025* and *Newark Kids Count* data reports. This year, we celebrate the historic return of the *Camden Kids Count* report.



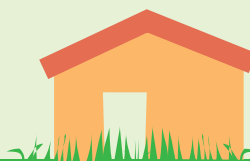
60,365

NJ children were enrolled in state-funded preschool in 2023-24.

Enrollment Between 2021-22 and 2023-24

13%

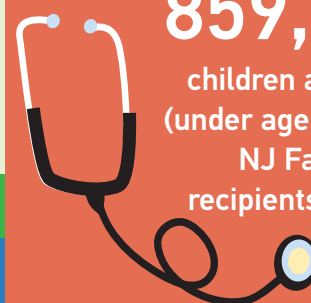
2,010,290



children and youth (under age 18) are living in the Garden State... and 1 in 4 is under the age of 5.

859,972

children and youth (under age 19) were NJ FamilyCare recipients in 2024.



Building Safer, More Supportive Communities for New Jersey's Youth and Families

ACNJ served on New Jersey's Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents, which examined how social media impacts young people. The Commission published recommendations aimed at preserving social media's benefits while reducing potential harms

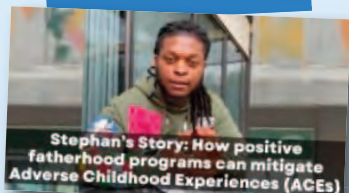
– including banning cellphones at school and delaying social media access until age 16. To learn more, visit acnj.org/socialmedia commission.



When poverty is mistaken for neglect, vulnerable families pay the price. In response to the growing number of unfounded neglect reports, the **New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect**, co-chaired by ACNJ President and CEO Mary Coogan, approved community stakeholder recommendations to strengthen training on when and how to report child abuse and neglect to the state hotline. The Task Force also endorsed changes to certain reporting requirements to ensure reports are made appropriately and safely. To learn more, visit nj.gov/dcf/providers/boards/njtfcan/.

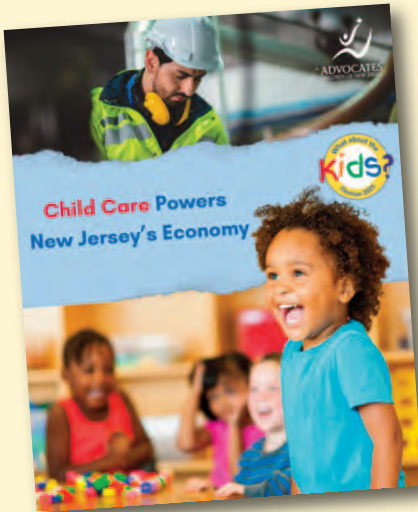
New Jersey Youth Need a Y.E.S!

A new project within ACNJ's Positive Youth Development initiative, the **We Need a Y.E.S.** video series amplified the voices of youth who are too often excluded from conversations about solutions. Featuring Youth Expert Stakeholders (Y.E.S.), the series gave young people a platform to share their lived experiences and ideas for building stronger, more supportive communities.



Helping More Children *Start Strong*

Ensuring New Jersey's Next Governor Prioritizes Child Care



With a new governor and general assembly being elected this November, ACNJ's **#NJVOTES4KIDS** campaign is educating candidates on key issues affecting children and families while informing and mobilizing the public to make children a priority in the election — and beyond.

At the September *Start Strong NJ* launch, both Republican gubernatorial candidate Jack Ciattarelli and Democratic Lt. Governor candidate Dr. Dale Caldwell pledged to prioritize child care.



"Everybody has a different affordability crisis; for those with small children, [child care] is a crisis. And I think there's room to fix it in our budget."

JACK CIATARELLI
Republican Candidate
for Governor



"[Investing in child care] is really one of the most important things we can do for New Jersey. ... It's personal for [Mikie Sherrill] and it's personal for me."

DR. DALE CALDWELL
Democratic Candidate for
Lieutenant Governor

The First 1,000 Days Policy Coalition and **Start Strong NJ** campaign, newly co-chaired by ACNJ and NJAEYC, work to ensure every child in New Jersey gets a strong start in life.

The coalition advocates for policies that support families from birth to age three by expanding access to affordable, high-quality child care. The campaign highlights child care as essential infrastructure — fueling New Jersey's economy, supporting working families, and investing in a stronger future.

Together, the coalition and campaign will continue advocating for bold investments to keep child care at the forefront of the next governor's administration's agenda.



The First 1,000 Days Policy Coalition members, pictured left, including **NJ Citizen Action**, **Moms First**, and **Rutgers Center for Women and Work**.

ACNJ leads the **Unlocking Potential (UP) Prenatal-to-Eight Coalition**, now 40+ members strong, comprised of parents, caregivers, providers, and community leaders, working together towards a shared vision: To create equitable communities where every child can thrive.



The UP Coalition aims to:

- Lift UP Parent and Provider Voice
- Step UP Maternal-Infant Health Care and Family Supports
- Raise UP High-quality Early Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers
- Build UP Systems, Resources, and A Culturally Diverse Workforce

in Early Childhood

Engaging New Voices

ACNJ broadened its reach by bringing together family and provider voices through diverse channels of engagement.

THE 9:30 A.M. CALL.

A new forum connecting NJ child care providers to exchange ideas, address shared challenges, and work together on solutions that strengthen and unify the state's child care community.



ENGAGING FATHERS. ACNJ convened fathers across the state to hear their experiences, understand their needs, and involve them in advocacy efforts. The insights gathered will inform upcoming findings and recommendations.



▲ ACNJ and partners standing with Senator Britnee Timberlake, Assemblywoman Shanique Speight, and Senator Angela McKnight (3rd–5th from left).



◀ Assemblywoman Aura Dunn (right) speaking at the Morristown Town Hall on New Jersey's Child Care Assistance Application Freeze. Pictured with Nancy Henriquez (left), Family Liaison/Administrative Assistant at Cornerstone Family Programs.

CHILD CARE ADVOCACY IN ACTION. Ahead of the state budget deadline, ACNJ hosted *Strolling Thunder 2025*, where parents and providers met virtually with 16 members of the New Jersey Legislature to advocate for full funding of the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). When funding fell short, resulting in a freeze on new applications, ACNJ held child care town halls across the state to elevate the voices of parents, caregivers, and providers directly impacted — highlighting the real effects on families and the child care system.

Building the Future of Public Preschool Together

COMMUNITY-BASED PRIVATE PROVIDER CONFERENCE. In October, ACNJ and NJAEYC hosted New Jersey's first Community-Based Private Provider Conference, uniting more than 200 early childhood leaders, educators, researchers, and advocates — including providers from 72 school districts, funders, higher education partners, county Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, franchisees, and early childhood supervisors. With 18 presenters leading 15 breakout sessions, participants engaged in five hours of professional development focused on strengthening partnerships and advancing quality in community-based preschool.



As New Jersey brings universal public pre-K to more communities, ACNJ remains steadfast supporting expansion efforts while also strengthening the broader early care and education system.

ACNJ's Dr. Winifred Smith-Jenkins and other stakeholders played a pivotal role in making it possible for more child care centers to partner with school districts to expand preschool.

This includes:

- aligning preschool and child care **square footage requirements** to a single standard (minimum of 42 sq ft per child).
- allowing child care programs with fewer than 15 children per classroom to participate.
- permitting classrooms without in-room bathrooms to be eligible, provided a bathroom is available on the same floor.

Reaching More Families Than Ever

The KidLaw Resource Center remains a trusted advocate in New Jersey's education and child protection systems – **supporting over 350 families in 2024 and projected to reach 400 in 2025.**

In an unprecedented collaboration with attorneys from Amazon and Audible, ACNJ expanded the KidLaw library through a blog series designed to help parents and caregivers understand their rights and school-related laws. In a separate effort to advance legal advocacy for children, Staff Attorney Nina Peckman was invited to present on special and general education issues to attorneys representing the NJ Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP) as well as those representing parents.

Through these efforts, ACNJ continues to empower families and those working with them with the knowledge and resources they need to advocate for children and youth.

KidLaw



Keeping Children and Families Central to Policy and Funding Discussions

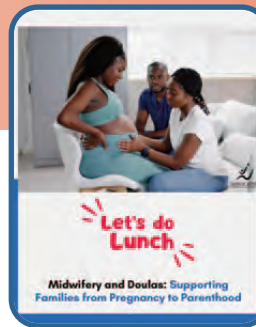
2,400+ New Jerseyans joined ACNJ's call to stop federal Medicaid cuts and protect families' access to essential care.



Influenced policy through **40+ strategic interactions** – including testimony and individual meetings – with state and federal lawmakers on healthcare, home visiting, child care, chronic absenteeism, and the state budget.



45 blogs in ACNJ's resource library focused on a variety of topics ranging from child care to education rights to maternal health to positive youth development.



860+ participating in ACNJ's monthly **Lunch and Learns**, highlighting different policy topics that impact children and families.



▲ Senior Policy Analyst Cindy Shields joined State of Affairs with Steve Aduabato to discuss the rising cost of child care and its impact on New Jersey's economy.

600+ participants joined ACNJ's immigration webinar to navigate policy changes and ensure child care settings remain safe and welcoming for all families.

◀ Staff Attorney Nina Peckman testified before the Senate Education Committee on chronic absenteeism.

Engaged with all 12 members of New Jersey's congressional delegation regarding home visiting, child care, and Medicaid.



ACNJ's Mary Coogan joined fellow advocates at a press conference with Rep. Frank Pallone to highlight how proposed Medicaid cuts would harm hospitals, community health centers, and millions of vulnerable residents.

In partnership with HOPES CAP in Hoboken, Rep. Bob Menendez engaged in meaningful conversations about the need to continue funding for Head Start, Medicaid, and other crucial programs vital to our children and families.

At Zadie's Nurturing Den in Summit, Rep. Tom Kean met with child care staff, NJAEYC, and ACNJ advocates to discuss the urgent need for investment in child care and Medicaid.

A sincere thank you to all of our supporters for your steadfast dedication to New Jersey's children and for your generous donations to ACNJ in 2024. Our work would not be possible without you.

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ACNJ's 2024 annual breakfast.*

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an incorrect heading, please contact
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