



June 24, 2020

Re: Unlocking Potential: A Roadmap for Making NJ the Safest, Healthiest and Most Supportive Place to Give Birth and Raise a Family

Dear Friends,

When the New Jersey Pritzker Leadership Team began meeting in July of 2019 to create a plan to make New Jersey the safest, healthiest and most supportive place to give birth and raise a family, we had no idea just how urgent having such a plan in place would be. The resulting prenatal to age 3 plan outlined in *Unlocking Potential* was due to be released around the time COVID-19 began to spread across our state, forcing us to postpone plans to share this critical report. In the following weeks, we struggled with when the most appropriate time for such a release should be, given that we do not yet know how long this public health crisis will last, nor can we fully understand its long-term budget, health, and societal impacts for our state. Eventually, we came to the conclusion that our work together, on behalf of our states infants and toddlers, needed to be shared, especially during this time.

The impacts of the current crisis have hit New Jersey families hard, particularly those with very young children. Without proper supports, children will undoubtedly experience the emotional distress and trauma of the pandemic's social and economic aftermath for many months to come. The recommended services outlined in *Unlocking Potential* have been a lifeline for many children and families—especially during this crisis, providing essential supports such as home visiting for new parents, child care, mental health services, nutritious meals and much more. But unfortunately, too few children and families have been able to benefit from these vital programs, leaving already overburdened families at an even greater risk.

Our plan is based on the belief that we all have a role to play in achieving equity and that supporting equal opportunities at the start of a child's life is the first step in eliminating disparities that impact outcomes for babies, families and communities. While the pathway forward is filled with many uncertainties, we are confident that the contents of this report will help to set the stage for lasting improvements to our disaster preparedness infrastructure and improve equitable access to the supports and services that protect our state's most overburdened and under-resourced children and families.

Sincerely,

Cecilia Zalkind
President & CEO
Advocates for Children of New Jersey

Giving Every Child A Chance