



A look back at 2022 as we wish our president and CEO Ceil Zalkind a happy retirement.

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Giving Every Child A Chance®



Cecilia Zalkind
President & CEO

This year marks the end of my tenure at Advocates for Children of New Jersey. I have worked at ACNJ for 38 years, the last 21 as president, and it is time for new leadership. It has been an honor to serve in this position and a privilege to do work that I loved and looked forward to every day. When I think about my time at ACNJ, what matters most to me are the incredible people

I have met — parents, state and national leaders, advocates and, most of all, the teachers, social workers, child care staff and so many others who do the work every day to make the world better for children. We partnered on so many successful initiatives to improve policy and programs for children, and I am humbled by their willingness to time and again put the interest of children above their own, sometimes at great risk to themselves. It is their experience and their courage that has truly made the difference and gives me hope in increasingly challenging times.

The ACNJ Board of Trustees has chosen Mary Coogan, our vice president, as the new CEO, and I am excited about the opportunity for her and for the organization. Her leadership, supported by our dedicated board and talented staff, can chart the course for the future of ACNJ and, more importantly, for the children of New Jersey.

Retirement is a word that suggests an ending. I prefer to think of it as moving to the next chapter, built on all the experiences that came before. I love Serena Williams' description of retirement as evolution. I am evolving toward the other things that are important to me. Thank you for your support and encouragement on this part of my journey.



Charles Venti
Chair, Board of Trustees

As the new Chair of the Board of Trustees, I am proud of ACNJ's persistent advocacy, working tirelessly to achieve gains for children as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt in every aspect of family life.

From addressing the immediate needs of infant-toddler child care to equipping parents with information so that students do not fall through the cracks, we ensured that priorities for children and families did not get lost in the conversation as lawmakers advanced policy solutions.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without you — our donors, parent and youth advocates, local leaders, community partners and so many individuals dedicated to children.

We know our work is far from over. Improved programs and policies, and increased public investments are necessary to help children reach their full potential. As the leading independent voice for children, ACNJ remains deeply committed to our goal of giving every child a chance to grow up safe, healthy and educated. On behalf of the ACNJ Board of Trustees, thank you for helping create brighter futures for children in the Garden State.

2022

JANUARY

- ACNJ's Kids Count Data Dashboard update includes the latest data on family assistance programs (WIC, TANF, SNAP), as well as nutrition, teens and young adults, and early care and education.

FEBRUARY

- Although New Jersey invested more than \$1 billion in child care during the Murphy administration, we are still coming up short, according to an op-ed coauthored by Cecilia Zalkind and early childhood expert Taryn Morrissey.



MARCH

- ACNJ carries out extensive outreach to child care providers for the NJ ARP Stabilization Grant. Webinars and interactive, smaller meetings were hosted in English and Spanish, helping center-based and family child care providers better understand the grant, successfully apply and access funding.
- Joined by Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz, ACNJ releases its annual Newark Kids Count. The report highlights data on the effects of COVID-19 on the city's children and families.



300+ providers participating

- In conjunction with the National Home Visiting Virtual Summit, ACNJ and home visiting partners participate in visits with members of New Jersey's congressional delegation to advocate for these critical services that support new parents and families with young children.



Bottom right: Congressman Andy Kim

APRIL

- Can New Jersey afford not to invest \$360M in child care? Cecilia Zalkind makes the case for a package of bills that would be a significant step forward in building an accessible, affordable, equitable child care system for New Jersey families.
- ACNJ begins its first series of informative videos on education rights, covering school discipline, special education and bullying.

200 trained on education law and advocacy

Leveraging the Power of Parent and Youth Voices

Valuing the expertise of lived experiences, ACNJ empowered dozens of parent and youth advocates to share their stories and amplify issues that matter to them.



Newark Future Policymakers

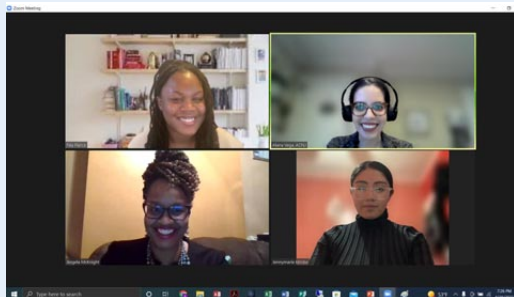
ACNJ embarked on its first-ever Newark Future Policymakers program in February, consisting of 17 talented young people who live, work or go to school

in the City of Newark. After several months of learning sessions, these Future Policymakers worked to identify policy solutions to improve the lives of Newark residents. Each group presented their ideas to a panel of esteemed guests in a final symposium. Three Future Policymakers continued at ACNJ as Fellows to work on a special section of Newark Kids Count.



Parent Leadership Council

Equipping parents with information, training, support and guidance, members of the Parent Leadership Council continued to speak out on what families need to help their children thrive. This included social media campaigns, letters to the editor and public interviews about their child care struggles and balancing work amidst a pandemic. ACNJ also facilitated meetings with legislative offices as well as parent testimony as lawmakers were making budget decisions.

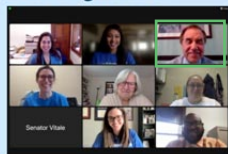


Assemblywoman Angela V. McKnight (bottom left) speaks with Jennymarie Idrobo (bottom right) and Nia Pierce (top left), two of our Newark Future Policymakers, and ACNJ's Alana Vega (top right), to discuss her law requiring financial literacy lessons for middle school students.

MAY

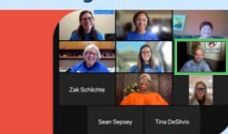
- For our fifth Strolling Thunder New Jersey, ACNJ facilitates a series of meetings between parents and legislators about programs and policies they need to support their baby's healthy development.
- As we emerge from the pandemic, ACNJ's blog highlights the need for New Jersey to make access to infant mental and behavioral health services a priority.

Today, I met with my State legislator!



Because it's time to talk about babies.

Today, I met with my State legislator!



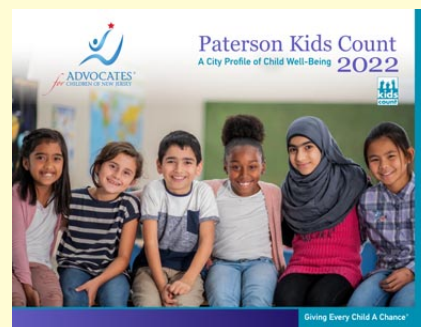
Because it's time to talk about babies.

Top photo: Speaker Craig Coughlin
Bottom photo: Senator Edward Durr

JUNE

- ACNJ's Special Education Guide, a comprehensive booklet informing parents of their child's education rights from preschool through graduation, is updated.
- The updated Kinship Legal Guardianship (KLG) Guide explains how KLG may be an option when a foster child has been under a resource parent's care for a long time, and it is unlikely that the child will be able to be safely reunited with their parents.
- In partnership with the Paterson Alliance, ACNJ releases Paterson Kids Count, offering five-year data trends regarding children and their families on the topics of demographics, family economic security, child health, child protection, child care, education and information regarding teens, comparing the numbers to Passaic County and the state when available.

750 downloads of education guides and fact sheets



Giving Every Child A Chance

Reimagining Child Care

Working alongside parents and statewide partners, ACNJ continues to push for better solutions to reimagine a child care system that families can afford. Most recently, ACNJ worked with early childhood champions and bill sponsors Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin to pass the Thriving By Three (A4179/S2476) initiative, a competitive grant program to increase child care options for infants and toddlers.

This legislation will:

- bring long-awaited relief to some parents who need child care to return to work;

- address the persistent need for child care in communities with few options for their very young children;

- help providers struggling to find staff to care for infants and toddlers who need care;

- and be key to New Jersey's economic recovery.



ACNJ joins a roundtable discussion hosted by Senator Bob Menendez focused on the struggle of our nation's child care infrastructure (L to R: East Orange Mayor Ted Green, Senator Menendez, Zadie's Early Childhood Center Senior Director Winifred Smith-Jenkins, ACNJ Senior Policy Analyst Cynthia Rice and President and CEO Cecilia Zalkind).

Budget/Legislative Achievements:

- \$28 million for the Thriving by Three Child Care Initiative, a competitive grant program to expand access to infant and toddler care
- An extension of the child care subsidy payments based on enrollment, not attendance
- \$68 million in preschool expansion funding
- \$120 million in federal funds to upgrade existing and build new preschool facilities to support preschool expansion
- \$30 million for child care to fund facilities' improvements and employee supports
- Passage of a state-level Child Tax Credit that will provide up to \$500 in refundable tax credit for families with children under the age of six whose household earnings are \$80,000 or less
- \$15 million to raise Medicaid rates for maternity care providers, and additional funds for midwifery education and Connecting NJ agencies to support families with young children
- \$20 million in state and federal funds to implement the State-wide Universal Newborn Home Nurse Visitation Program
- \$11 million for Phase 2 of the Cover All Kids Initiative, helping enroll more uninsured children into NJ FamilyCare, New Jersey's publicly funded health insurance



ACNJ joins other early childhood advocates at a press conference hosted by Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz (center) announcing her legislative package intended to improve and expand child care for babies and toddlers in New Jersey. (Dana DiFilippo/New Jersey Monitor)



AUGUST

- ACNJ holds its first-ever 5K run, introducing dedicated athletes to the organization.
- ACNJ's Kids Count Data Dashboard shows decreases in NJ Earned Income Tax Credit participation. Other updated indicators include trend data on child and family economics, child protection and teens and young adults.

SEPTEMBER

- **Help Wanted! Child Care Staffing Crisis Means Still No Room for Babies**, ACNJ's most recent report, finds that child care providers are still struggling in recruiting and retaining staff due to low wages, causing them to take on fewer infants and toddlers.
- **Blog on adolescent mental health** highlights how the rise of telemedicine presents an opportunity to address the current health needs among youth.

OCTOBER

- **The Assembly Women and Children Committee, in partnership with ACNJ, brings together a group of experts and parents to highlight the importance of infant mental health.**



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Nearly 40 Years at the Helm, Advocating for New Jersey's Children: A Heartfelt Farewell

At the close of 2022, Advocates for Children of New Jersey will bid farewell to Cecilia “Ceil” Zalkind as she ventures into a much-deserved retirement. Although we are excited for her next chapter, Ceil will be sorely missed. Not only has her name become synonymous with consensus building and unwavering advocacy for New Jersey’s children, but she has also been a compassionate and strong leader. She leaves a legacy that is both powerful and far-reaching, and we are forever grateful for her service.

Under her leadership, ACNJ achieved transformative wins for thousands of New Jersey’s children:

- Improving the well-being of children living in foster care through legislation and policy, as well as arguing before the NJ Supreme Court about the permanency needs of children in foster care. Ceil authored several ACNJ studies that impacted child protective services cases, including *Splintered Lives* about decision-making for children in foster care, which led to improvements in the child protection agency and court systems. She was instrumental in the passage of the Child Placement Bill of Rights — a law that established independent rights for children living in foster care.
- Ensuring New Jersey’s state-funded preschool programs were high-quality, arguing before the New Jersey Supreme Court on preschool standards



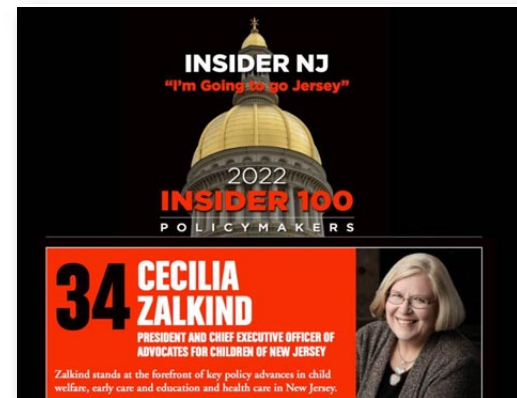
Signing of the Out-Of-Home Placement Bill of Rights with Cecilia Zalkind and Senator Gabe Ambrosio.



in *Abbott v. Burke*, the landmark decision that mandated public preschool in 31 of the state’s poorest districts. Ceil chaired the Early Care and Education Coalition, which laid the foundation for the state’s nationally-recognized preschool model.

- Ensuring more students start the school day with a healthy morning meal. The Breakfast After the Bell campaign pushed New Jersey to one of the top 20 states in the nation for school breakfast participation after placing nearly last for years.
- Partnering with other stakeholders to make reforms to the juvenile justice system, including raising the minimum age at which judges can “waive” or transfer juvenile offenders into the adult system to 15 years old and narrowing the list of offenses that can lead to prosecution as an adult.
- Securing the passage of a universal home visiting law, allowing parents the opportunity to receive at least one visit from a nurse within two weeks of the baby’s birth or adoption at no expense to the parents. New Jersey is the second state in the country to provide this service to new parents.

Before joining ACNJ as public policy director in 1984, Ceil’s exposure to child advocacy began by working as a caseworker for what is now the state Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P). She saw first-hand the failures of a system not responsive to the needs of foster children. After starting a family, Ceil went to law school, knowing she wanted to make a positive change on a policy level instead of a case-by-case basis. In 2001, Cecilia became the executive director of ACNJ, succeeding Ciro Scalera.



About Us

Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) is the trusted, independent voice putting children’s needs first for more than 40 years. A cornerstone of ACNJ’s success is our independence. We are non-partisan and accept no state funding for advocacy, giving us the freedom to speak up for children who have no voice and no vote.

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.**

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 2021. Our work would not be possible without you.

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