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®
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.

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.
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.

**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.

**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.
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.

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
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.
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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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