

INTRODUCTION

The Westchester County Board of Legislators created the Families Task Force to expand community participation into the legislative process. Co-chaired by the Hon. Catherine Borgia, Democratic Majority Leader and Kathy Halas, Executive Director of the Child Care Council of Westchester, the Task Force is comprised of a large and diverse group of individuals and organizations that work with and represent families of all kinds throughout Westchester.

In 2015, the Task Force held four public forums to hear directly from families about their challenges and needs. Attendees offered their ideas to make Westchester an even better place for raising families and remaining in the county. The evening forums in White Plains, Mt. Kisco, Yonkers and Peekskill, each drew a diverse and energetic audience; the appreciation for what Westchester offers in quality of life was palpable as was the enthusiasm for what Westchester could become. Each forum generated issues and thoughtful recommendations agreed upon by the community attendees. Regardless of the forum's location, however, common themes emerged; these themes formed the basis for the Thriving Families Resolution for Westchester County, a guide for policy-making and resource allocation going forward.

The Thriving Families Resolution drafted by the Families Task Force addresses six broad areas, all integral to the well-being of Westchester families: housing, child care/after school, employment and job training, schools and home supports, transportation, and medical and mental health. Many Westchester families already experience opportunities and a "quality of life" that are unparalleled in the nation. Our entire community would be strengthened if those opportunities and quality of life were available to others. But this task cannot fall to government alone. A Thriving Westchester will only be maximized if the community comes together – nonprofits, business, faith community, philanthropy and private individuals and groups. Adoption of the Thriving Families Resolution by the Board of Legislators however, sends a powerful message that the voices of constituents have been heard, that families are important in all their many forms, and that working in partnership, Westchester will strive to provide the opportunities and resources families need to thrive and contribute. Application of the Thriving Families Resolution in on-going policy-making and resource decisions could not only improve families' circumstances, it could further distinguish Westchester as a most desirable place for families to live and work.

Starting this fall, the Families Task Force will hold a series of interactive policy conversations around each of the issue areas to discuss ideas for new, expanded or re-purposed strategies and programs. The Task Force will then identify issues to pursue via public education, program development/collaboration and/or legislation and advocacy. This process will be on-going, and a vehicle for collaborative critical thinking and action by all of us who support a strong future for this county.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY THRIVING FAMILIES RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Westchester County Board of Legislators, among its duties and responsibilities, is charged with promoting and improving the overall security, stability, health, and well-being of the County's families, regardless of their composition; and

WHEREAS, availability of the following services and opportunities positions families to make meaningful and essential contributions to our community; and

WHEREAS families can thrive in safe, stable, livable, accessible and affordable housing, with nearby access to food, libraries and green spaces that also provide safe havens for children and teens without consideration to race, ethnicity, age, gender identification or economic status; and

WHEREAS, families can thrive with appropriate child care and after school programs that offer a secure, nurturing, and enriching environment while parents and other kinship care givers work, pursue education, or job training; and

WHEREAS, families can thrive with meaningful employment in jobs that provide living wages, benefits, and suitable skills-training that lead to advancement or future jobs; and

WHEREAS, families can thrive with healthy, supportive, safe and fully-funded schools, home life, recreation environments and substantive youth employment opportunities that impart job-readiness skills for a changing labor force; and

WHEREAS, families can thrive with an accessible and reasonably priced County-wide transportation system that includes no cost/low cost transportation to public schools and after school programs and

WHEREAS, families can thrive with access to comprehensive, affordable, quality medical and mental health care; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Westchester County Board of Legislators shall continue to support the advancement of County policies and services, to be done in anticipation of, and in the promotion of the current and future needs of our families for stable and affordable housing, child care and after school opportunities, meaningful employment with relevant job training, safe schools and home lives, intergenerational and inclusive social, recreational and cultural activities, accessible public transportation, and comprehensive, affordable quality medical and mental health care; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Board of Legislators, working in partnership with nonprofits, governments, businesses and other stakeholders, will continue to advocate for Westchester families at the state, federal and local levels; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Board of Legislators requests that the County Executive and all Commissioners and Department heads consider these principles when creating new programs, contracts or projects, or in evaluating current programs, contracts or projects; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Clerk of the Westchester County Board of Legislators forward this resolution to the Westchester County Executive.