



RMAPI Policy Agenda For 2020

The Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI) has developed a list of policy priorities for 2020 with actions aimed at addressing the root causes of poverty. These policy priorities were developed by RMAPI's Policy Working Group after several months of meeting with local experts, community and government leaders, representatives from non-profit agencies, and people directly impacted by poverty to determine which actions would be the most effective and the most needed to address poverty. The policy priorities for 2020 include:

Strengthen Working Family Tax Credits

RMAPI calls on New York State to better support low-income families, children, and young adults through expanded and strengthened refundable tax credits for working families. The proposed tax credits would:

- Remove the phase-in of the Empire State Child Credit to make it available to the state's poorest children and families.
- Establish a \$1,000 young child credit (children under 4) and expand the existing credit to \$500 for children four and older. Children under 4 are currently excluded from the state's child tax credit, but are the most likely to live in poverty.
- Increase and expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which encourages work and lessens the "benefits cliff," by increasing the state's match to 45 percent and extending the credit to childless young workers.

How does this help low-income families?

Research has shown that robust child allowances are the most effective strategy for reducing child poverty. The landmark 2019 *Consensus Study Report: A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty* by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that a \$250 per month child allowance for low-income children alone could reduce child poverty nationally by more than 40 percent. If New York were to provide an annual \$1,000 credit for young children, in addition to the up to \$2,000 per child federal child tax credit, it would allow tens of thousands of young, low-income children to receive the equivalent of a \$250 per month allowance.

Funding to Improve Child Care Access and Quality

Across the country, one-third of low-income families who pay for child care for their young children are pushed into poverty by child care expenses. The cost of child care in New York is unaffordable for nearly all low and middle-income families, and fewer than 20 percent of low-income New York families eligible for child care subsidies are receiving them. To address these challenges, RMAPI calls on New York State to:

- Commit to achieving universal access to quality, affordable child care by 2025.
- Invest at least \$40 million to raise child care educator wages, strengthening and supporting this crucial workforce.
- Invest at least \$60 million to enable more low-income families to access child care subsidies and to eliminate unfair disparities in eligibility and benefits among counties

How does this help low-income families?

A lack of access to child care causes many parents, overwhelmingly women, to drop out of the workforce for long periods of time. This sharply reduces family income, lowers future earnings and retirement savings, and creates a steeper path to economic security.

Increase Funding for Public Transportation

RMAPI supports an increase in state funding for Rochester's Regional Transit Service (RTS) to implement and build upon its Reimagine RTS transit system redesign in Monroe County to better meet the needs, demands, and expectations of the community. By improving frequency and mobility options, RTS will provide more choices and greater access to people across the county. The ask includes:

- A 10 percent increase in Statewide Mass Transit Operating Assistance to better meet the growing needs of customers. For RTS, this increase will allow for additional frequent routes, more on-demand zones, and increased service on Saturdays.

- Funding for a five-year capital/infrastructure plan. In Monroe County, the funding need for projects identified as a priority is \$59.3 million. This would be used to build a new paratransit facility and expand usage of electric buses. Statewide, RTS and its partner transit systems are looking for a five-year, \$1 billion capital plan to fund critical, unmet capital/infrastructure needs.

How does Reimagine RTS help low-income people in Monroe County?

Access to reliable transportation has been identified as one of the biggest barriers to employment for low-income individuals. The Reimagine RTS plan will greatly increase access, reliability, and options for those who use public transportation, allowing them to more directly connect to hubs of employment.

Support Parole Reform (Less is More Act)

RMAPI supports efforts to reform the state’s parole structure and move away from a system that reincarcerates people for technical violations like missing an appointment with a parole officer, being late for curfew, or testing positive for alcohol.

To improve parole, the Less is More Act would:

- Provide earned time credits. People under community supervision would be eligible to earn a 30-day “earned time credits” reduction in their community supervision period for every 30-day period in which they do not violate a condition of supervision.
- Bolster due process by giving those under community supervision a hearing in a local criminal court before they are detained and provide speedy hearings.
- Restrict the use of incarceration for the majority of technical violations. Certain technical violations could still result in jail time, but it would be capped at a maximum of 30 days.

How would parole reform affect poverty?

Across the state, there are close to 35,000 people under active parole supervision who could see their efforts to rejoin the workforce and reintegrate into their families and their communities disrupted because of a technical violation. This system creates a steep path out of poverty for those affected and is costly for taxpayers.

End Driver’s License Suspension for Unpaid Fees and Fines

RMAPI calls on the New York State Legislature to sign the Driver’s License Suspension Reform Act. Under current law, thousands of New Yorkers have driver’s licenses suspended every year simply because they cannot afford to pay traffic fines and fees. Between January 2016 and April 2018, the state issued close to 1.7 million driver’s license suspensions for traffic debt. These license suspensions are nine times higher in the state’s ten poorest communities compared to the ten wealthiest. The Driver’s License Suspension Reform Act would:

- End driver’s license suspensions for nonpayment of traffic tickets and for not appearing at a traffic hearing.
- Reinstate all driver’s licenses previously suspended for failure to pay or appear.
- Make affordable payment plans available for traffic debt.

How will this policy support low-income families?

New Yorkers who cannot afford to pay their tickets often face an impossible choice—losing their ability to drive and potentially their livelihood as well, or risking criminal charges and additional fines and fees. Research from across the country shows that these suspensions disrupt lives, cause economic instability, and criminalize poverty.

Improving Housing Access

In addition to the five policies described in detail, RMAPI also supports the work of local advocates to improve access to housing for low income residents of Monroe County. With our partners, we support efforts to:

- Enforce the ban on source of income discrimination by funding legal services providers to represent tenants in cases of discrimination.
- Establish a county-wide pilot project to provide legal assistance in eviction proceedings.
- Ensure sufficient crisis resources for those experiencing homelessness.

How will these efforts help those affected by poverty?

Safe and reliable housing is a cornerstone of self-sufficiency. By increasing access to housing and helping people in times of crisis, they are able to continue on their path out of poverty.

About RMAPI

The Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI) is a multi-sector community collaborative whose aim is to **improve quality of life by reducing poverty and increasing self-sufficiency**. RMAPI has developed three guiding principles to inform its work and serve as a guide for community decision-making: **address structural racism, address trauma and build community**. For more details on the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative, visit www.endingpoverty.org.