Preventing and addressing childhood trauma requires a multipronged approach that strengthens protective factors for children and families and invests in a child- and family-serving support system. Over the past decade, various stakeholders in Georgia — policymakers, philanthropists, providers, and others — have invested in the state’s child- and family-serving systems, supporting child well-being and preventing or mitigating childhood trauma. Such investments have included the integration of training on child development and trauma within child-serving state agencies and among child-serving professionals, the collaboration between state agencies and nonprofit organizations on efforts to prevent childhood trauma, and the expansion of programs and services that support family safety and well-being and thus protect children from potentially traumatic events. (See detailed descriptions in the Foreword.)

Building on these investments, and aligning with the protective factors for child well-being outlined on page 18, Voices for Georgia’s Children recommends the following state and local policies to improve upon the state’s systems to prevent, respond to, and mitigate childhood trauma:

### Connect Youth to Caring Adults
- Continue to invest in high-quality after-school programs.
- Provide state funding to ensure a licensed counselor, nurse, and social worker in every school.
- Expand wraparound services in schools and assist school leaders in leveraging community assets to provide needed services and supports within schools.
- Promote policies and practices that help create an organizational culture that supports child-serving professionals in navigating clinical burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

### Strengthen Economic Supports
- Continue to explore a Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) needs-based triage system for Family Support Services to connect families with resources for housing, food access, and other basic needs.
- Promote the Prevent Child Abuse Georgia helpline (1-800-CHILDREN) and resource map that connects caregivers to needed resources.
- Continue to invest in alternative paths to obtaining post-secondary education, including affordable tuition and flexible class schedules (e.g., HOPE scholarships and grants).
- Invest in affordable housing via the Georgia Department of Community Affairs’ Safe and Affordable Housing initiative and incentivize landlords to accept housing vouchers.
Promote Social Norms That Protect Against Violence and Adversity
• Continue to promote trainings like Connections Matter that are designed to improve resiliency and prevent childhood trauma, and evidence-based sexual abuse prevention training (e.g., Darkness to Light) for caregivers and child-serving professionals.
• Maximize implementation of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act and expand efforts to recruit and onboard kinship and foster care families and, once they are on-boarded, ensure that they have the assistance they need (financial and otherwise).
• Raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to include 17-year-old adolescents to ensure a developmentally appropriate response to the youth and provision of supportive services (e.g., mental health and substance use disorder treatment, evidence-based programs for social-emotional development).
• Eliminate provisions that automatically transfer (without juvenile court approval) certain youth to adult courts and consider eliminating juvenile life without parole sentences.

Intervene to Lessen Harms
• Increase behavioral health professional training in evidence-based therapies to support parents or caregivers who have experienced trauma.
• Ensure that training on trauma-informed care and implicit/explicit bias is provided to all stakeholders who engage with children in any way (e.g., law enforcement, school resource officers, school faculty and staff, child care and after-school providers, child welfare and foster care settings) to recognize trauma and serve children in a trauma-informed way.
• Continue to invest in comprehensive school-based health centers, the Georgia Apex Program (a state-supported program that provides mental health services in schools), and other school-based mental health programs.
• Strengthen case management and planning for successful transitions for youth who are in foster care or juvenile justice detention and transitioning out of the system.
• Fund the implementation of the Children in Need of Services, or CHINS, program established by Georgia law that mandates certain children (who have committed an offense only applicable to a child such as running away, truancy, driving past curfew, etc.) must always be placed in the least restrictive placement and that provides/coordinates supportive services.
• Invest in family-centered treatment for substance use disorders.
• Adopt a universal standard of cultural and linguistic competency and trauma-informed care training and requirements for new and existing behavioral health professionals.

Ensure a Strong Start for Children
• Expand evidence-based home visiting programs.
• Continue to invest in Georgia Pre-K and Childcare and Parent Services.
• Increase access to early intervention services (including infant and early childhood services) and universal screenings to provide early diagnoses, appropriate care, and treatment when needed.

Teach Life Skills
• Continue to invest in Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities’ youth peer drop-in centers, resiliency support clubhouses, and other programs that assist youth in developing stress-management, coping, and problem-solving skills.

ix. As of July 2021, there were 16 part-time wraparound services coordinators in Georgia schools.
x. This recommendation reinforces and aligns with recommendations for increasing family economic stability, family mental health or access to early childhood education in the child abuse and neglect state plan, A Vision for Child & Family Well-being in Georgia: Our State’s Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Plan.
xii. Provides a supportive environment for young adults, aged 16-26, to learn skills needed for adulthood.
xiv. As of January 2021, the Georgia Apex Program served approximately 630 schools.
xv. O.C.G.A. 15-11-2