

**SENATE, No. 3985**

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**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**  
**219th LEGISLATURE**

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INTRODUCED JUNE 24, 2021

**Sponsored by:**

**Senator VIN GOPAL**

**District 11 (Monmouth)**

**Senator NIA H. GILL**

**District 34 (Essex and Passaic)**

**SYNOPSIS**

“Establishes Children, Youth, and Families Bill of Rights” to recognize and protect certain rights for children, youth, families.

**CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**

As introduced.



1 AN ACT concerning the rights of children, youth, and families and  
2 supplementing Title 9 of the Revised Statutes.

3  
4 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*  
5 *of New Jersey:*

6  
7 1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

8 a. Families, in their many shapes and forms, remain the bedrock  
9 of our society. Today, families, and the communities in which they  
10 live, face challenges that are multi-faceted and often overwhelming.

11 b. A changing economy and limited public resources have  
12 contributed to symptoms of family and community distress,  
13 including institutional racism, increased high school drop-out and  
14 incarceration rates, higher incidences of child abuse and neglect,  
15 substance use and homelessness, and high unemployment and  
16 underemployment.

17 c. The fewer resources families have in their communities and  
18 the greater obstacles they face, the greater chance that families  
19 experience poor health outcomes, become dependent on government  
20 assistance, and become involved with the child welfare system.

21 d. Studies show that aspects of a child's environment, including  
22 living in a distressed community and growing up in a household  
23 with substance use, mental health problems, parental separation, or  
24 household members being in jail or prison, can undermine the  
25 child's sense of safety, stability, and bonding and can lead to  
26 trauma that impacts the child's life well into adulthood.

27 e. Childhood trauma can have lasting, negative effects on a  
28 child's health, well-being, and opportunity and can increase the  
29 risks of suicide, childhood injury, sexually transmitted infections,  
30 teen pregnancy, involvement in sex trafficking, and a wide range of  
31 chronic diseases and leading causes of death such as cancer,  
32 diabetes, and heart disease.

33 f. Creating and sustaining safe, stable, nurturing relationships  
34 and communities for all children and their families can prevent  
35 childhood trauma, promote family success, and help children and  
36 families reach their full potential.

37 g. The obligation of the State is to recognize and protect the  
38 rights of all children, youth and families through its articulation of a  
39 clear and specific bill of rights, and through an affirmation by the  
40 State of its commitment to enforce these rights in order to protect  
41 and promote the welfare of all its citizens.

42  
43 2. All children, youth, and families in the State of New Jersey  
44 shall have the following rights;

45 a. To clean and safe land, air, and water;

46 b. To safety at home, at school, in the workplace, and in their  
47 communities;

48 c. To strong, permanent, loving, and nurturing households;

- d. To earn a living that allows for a decent standard of living to afford adequate, safe, and appropriate food, clothing, and housing;
- e. To full and equal participation in making decisions that impact their lives;
- f. To respect, dignity, equal opportunity, and absolute freedom from any forms of prejudice, bigotry, or discrimination;
- g. To adequate, affordable, and age and developmentally appropriate medical and mental and behavioral health care;
- h. To life-long, quality, and age and developmentally appropriate learning and educational opportunities;
- i. To meaningful spiritual, cultural, and recreational experiences;
- j. To practice the religion of their choice;
- k. To learn about and celebrate the rich diversity of all racial, cultural, ethnic, spiritual, and linguistic traditions; and
- l. To services, public policies, practices, and the allocation of public resources that promote child, youth, and family well-being.

3. a. The Department of Children and Families shall publish a notice of the bill of rights enumerated in section 1 of this act, and shall make the notice available to the public on its Internet website.

b. Each health care facility, county welfare agency or county board of social services, Division of Child Protection and Permanency local office, emergency shelter for the homeless, domestic violence shelter, library, school, community-based and non-profit agencies and organizations providing services to children and families in the State shall post a copy of this notice in a conspicuous location that is available to the public.

4. Pursuant to the “Administrative Procedure Act,” P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), the Department of Children and Families shall adopt rules and regulations to effectuate the purposes of this act.

5. This act shall take effect immediately.

#### STATEMENT

This bill establishes a “Children, Youth, and Families Bill of Rights” that would recognize and protect the following rights of all children, youth and families: to clean and safe land, air, and water; to safety at home and at school, in the workplace, and in their communities; to strong, permanent, loving, and nurturing household; to earn a living that allows for a decent standard of living to afford adequate, safe, and appropriate food, clothing, and housing; to full and equal participation in making decisions that impact their lives; to respect, dignity, equal opportunity, and

1 absolute freedom from any forms of prejudice, bigotry, or  
2 discrimination; to adequate, affordable, and age and  
3 developmentally appropriate medical and mental and behavioral  
4 health care; to life-long, quality, and age and developmentally  
5 appropriate learning and educational opportunities; to meaningful  
6 spiritual, cultural, and recreational experiences; to practice the  
7 religion of their choice; to learn about and celebrate the rich  
8 diversity of all racial, cultural, ethnic, spiritual, and linguistic  
9 traditions; and o services, public policies, practices, and the  
10 allocation of public resources that promote child, youth, and family  
11 well-being.

12 The Department of Children and Families would be required to  
13 publish a notice of the bill of rights enumerated in the bill and  
14 make the notice available to the public on its Internet website.

15 The bill further stipulates that each health care facility, county  
16 welfare agency or county board of social services, Division of Child  
17 Protection and Permanency local office, emergency shelter for the  
18 homeless, domestic violence shelter, library, school, community-  
19 based and non-profit agencies and organizations providing services  
20 to children and families in the State would post a copy of this notice  
21 in a conspicuous location that is available to the public.