

Georgia Appleseed advances justice for Georgia’s most underrepresented children, focusing on children who endure racism and discrimination, disability, poverty, abuse and neglect, and involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. We develop our policy priorities using a three-pronged approach: (1) making direct connections with Georgia children and families, (2) convening statewide coalitions and engaging local communities, and (3) employing rigorous legal research and analysis to craft pragmatic solutions. The following 2026 policy priorities incorporate and build upon our 2025 recommendations.ⁱ

1. **Ensure every child has the chance to learn in a safe and positive school climate:**
 - a. Reject **harmful zero-tolerance discipline** policies, including in response to **vaping**;
 - b. Amend **overly broad record-sharing rules** that keep children out of school;
 - c. Enforce new **school climate** mandates; and
 - d. Reduce **chronic absenteeism** by expanding Student Attendance and School Climate Committees and barring expulsions based on student absences.

2. **Increase children’s access to mental health supports in schools:**
 - a. Expand **investment in school-based behavioral health services**;
 - b. Improve **access to school support staff**, including school social workers and nurses;
 - c. Strengthen and diversify the **healthcare workforce** to meet children’s needs; and
 - d. Enforce **mental health parity** to improve reimbursement for school-based care.

3. **Make stable and healthy housing a reality for every child:**
 - a. Build a **coordinated campaign** in support of safe and healthy housing for children, youth and families;
 - b. **Increase state investment** in housing for children, youth and families;
 - c. Protect vulnerable children and families **living in hotels as last-resort housing**;
 - d. Expand **tenant protections**, including by updating the Safe At Home Act; and
 - e. Improve **landlord accountability** through rental registry and hidden fee reforms.

4. **Improve the lives of children in foster care:**
 - a. Ensure DFCS has **adequate funding and support** to serve children in its custody;
 - b. Reduce **school enrollment barriers** for children in foster care;
 - c. Expand **housing options for youth aging out of care**, including through vouchers; and
 - d. **Engage youth in care in policy-making** that impacts them.

ⁱ 2025 Policy Priorities available at <https://gaappleseed.org/resource/2025-policy-priorities/>.