



early care &  
Learning COUNCIL

*New York's child care resource network*

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing on  
2014-2015 Executive Budget Proposal:  
Human Services**

Submitted by  
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and input on Governor Cuomo's proposed budget for New York State. The Early Care & Learning Council is a statewide, not-for-profit organization, whose mission is to promote excellence in early care and education with equal access for all families. We do this primarily through the support of, and in partnership with, a strong network of 35 community-based organizations that provide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services. The Early Care & Learning Council is also a member of *Winning Beginning NY*, the State's early care and development coalition and fully supports the *Winning Beginning NY* legislative agenda.

Child Care Resource and Referral agencies have the capacity to bring child care information and support to the work place and to assist directly with employers. Parents can utilize our comprehensive services so they quickly obtain reliable child care that meets their needs and the requirements of their employers. We know where regulated child care exists and where additional capacity has to be developed to support emerging or growing businesses or respond to changes in employer needs. Child care is an infrastructure support for children, for families and for communities.

To thousands of parents, child care providers and employers throughout New York State, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) are the key to the child care service system. They help families make informed decisions about child care, recruit new providers, offer ongoing professional development and offer supports to the community. Whether it be through training, teen mother mentoring, resource libraries, conferences, advisory supports or one of any of the other hundreds of support they provide, these agencies, and their funding play a vital role in their communities.

If the early care and education sector were not supported, there would be many parents who could not work each day, as well as employers unable to operate or expand their businesses. Reliable, regulated, quality child care increases employee attendance, punctuality and productivity. The School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University has found that affordable and secure child care contributes to a more productive workforce & helps resolve work-family conflict. In 2011, nearly 1 million children under the age of 6 in New York State were in need of child care.

Despite this need, State funding for CCR&R agencies has remained flat while costs have been steadily rising. During that period CCR&Rs have patched together funding and reduced staffing to continue to support their critical mission of improving access to high quality child care. Furthermore, a nearly \$1 million funding cut in 2012 has jeopardized the capacity of the CCR&R network to connect families and communities to child care, keeping New Yorkers working while building quality early learning experiences for children, New York's future workforce.

Strengthened investment will allow CCR&Rs to provide critical family supports to currently underserved parents across New York State and to support the child care services so essential to New York's economic development.

More than 60% of our babies and 80% of our toddlers are in child care while their families work. The quality of that care, along with other early experiences, sets the foundation for children's lifelong success. Funding is needed to support development during these crucial years.

The New York State Infant-Toddler Resource Network has facilitated significant improvements in child care quality and bolstered public awareness about the importance of children's earliest years. In 2010, ARRA stimulus funds enabled the Office of Children and Family Services to double the funding for these centers that have otherwise been flat funded for 10 years. This allowed for the development of a statewide data and evaluation system to monitor the impact of their services and an increase in the number of Infant and Toddler Specialists statewide. In many counties, the services provided doubled.

Data show that with additional funding the Network: (1) increased awareness and knowledge in nationally recognized quality components of child care, (2) enhanced the quality of practice in child care for infants and toddlers, and (3) created and sustained professional collaborations and working relationships among the major players in the field of infant-toddler care and development. A targeted demonstration project to bring mental health professionals into child care for social and emotional consultation also occurred.

On June 30, 2011, the stimulus funds were exhausted. The demand for the services provided during this time still remains strong.

To compound these funding losses, counties have reduced eligibility levels for child care subsidies, increased parent copayments and closed intake altogether, therefore creating long waiting lists. Child care can account for up to 50% of the family budget, outpacing even rent or mortgage. New York State continues to fall short in meeting the need for financial assistance with child care, with tens of thousands of income-eligible families on the waiting list for subsidies. Parents need affordable care that supports their ability to work and children need care to nurture their development.

Subsidized child care is critical to ensuring that low-income working families can achieve financial stability through work. Subsidies influence child well-being because increases in parental income enhance child outcomes in school and throughout life. Children and families benefit when they have access to stable, consistent child care arrangements. Employers benefit too because access to dependable child care increases retention and productivity and reduces absenteeism in the workplace.

We ask that the State invest \$182 million in child care funding in 2014-15 to restore child care services for more than 13,000 children and add child care services for another 12,000 eligible children who need it now but are going un-served.

New York State law provides that working families are eligible for child care assistance if their income is under 200% of the federal poverty level (\$38,180 for a family of 3, for example). However, even though New York acknowledges that working parents at this income level need help paying for child care, more than 50% of eligible children go un-served every year. Using data shared by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services, an estimated 600,000 children are eligible.<sup>1</sup> Currently, though, less than 130,000 children are served at any given time.

The situation is urgent. Social Service Districts across New York State ran out of funding months before the end of 2013. Low-income working parents' belts are already tightened. Without this assistance, parents cannot make ends meet. Most importantly, by providing this critical assistance to working families, New York State is helping prepare children for school.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/childcare/LegReport%20USE%20FINAL.pdf>. The OCFS report estimates 562,656 under age 12; we added 1/12 to cover children in their 13<sup>th</sup> year who are also eligible.

At a time when New York is investing in education reform, it only makes sense to also invest in child care. Governor Cuomo has called for five years of sustained investment in Pre-Kindergarten and afterschool. Building on his proposal and the work of both the Assembly and Senate on child care, we propose a 5-year plan to ramp up the investment in child care to make it universal and truly meet the need. Universal Child Care: Invest \$182 million in child care subsidies in 2014-15 to add 25,000 eligible children to the program. Expand that investment in years 2 through 5 to reach \$2.2 billion annually, including current dollars, to provide universal access to an estimated 305,000 children.

Research tells us that the foundation for success in school and in life is developed well before a child enters kindergarten. In fact, a child's earliest experiences are responsible for wiring the brain for future use. Long term educational achievement is uniformly linked to participation in high quality early care and education. In the long-run, high quality early childhood programs are self-financing; in the short-run, a significant portion of program costs are offset by savings in remedial programs. High quality child care is not babysitting. It is promoting the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development of young children – at the stage of their development that matters most.

Children who have spent time in high quality child care environments have lasting benefits from the experience. Nobel Laureate Economist James Heckman asserts, "Smart, high quality, and targeted early childhood development promotes health, economic, and social outcomes by fusing cognitive skills with the critical social skills of attentiveness, persistence, and sociability."<sup>2</sup>

This why we applaud the expansion of full day pre-kindergarten statewide and are hopeful that this will provide thousands of 4 year olds with a good pre-k experience. We know New York's child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) will be working hard through the transition to help families identify wrap around care that is accessible and affordable. Our network of CCR&Rs will also be particularly interested in how this change affects the children and families in the 60% of Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) programs operating in community based programs like Head Start and child care centers. Currently there is requirement that at least 10% of funding to be invested in community programs

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<sup>2</sup> Heckman, J., 2009. "Stimulating the Young" The American. The Online Magazine of American Enterprise Institute.

and we would like to see this maintained. Furthermore, a mechanism is still needed to align standards and guidelines in order to assure that programs are indeed quality.

Implementation of statewide, universal, full-day Pre-K should include a quality framework—QUALITYstarsNY—with appropriate funding to do so. QUALITYstarsNY is New York’s quality rating and improvement system that is designed to increase quality in early learning settings – including community based organizations and schools - throughout the state.

QUALITYstarsNY is a five star rating and improvement system that can help programs meet the standards we all expect in our early childhood programs. High quality early learning experiences in the first five years are crucial to shaping the development of executive function skills, skills necessary today and in the future.

QUALITYstarsNY is designed to acknowledge programs that demonstrate quality above and beyond meeting New York State’s strong regulatory standards and develop a plan for improvement for all participating programs to reach the highest standards. While New York has developed QUALITYstarsNY, the program has not been implemented statewide due to the lack of state funding. .

An investment of \$5 million is needed to expand QUALITYstarsNY in existing locations. A steady commitment of future state dollars will be necessary to fully phase in QUALITYstarsNY statewide. This cost burden, as well as benefits, can be shared by multiple state agencies that are influential to the lives of our youngest citizens-our future workforce. The system covers the full spectrum of state licensed or regulated early care and education programs and services. Focus is on children ages 0-5, but standards for school-age child care have been developed.

Significant work has been done to create QUALITYstarsNY, but the State must invest in its full implementation in order to make the resource available to families, as well as the children that need it to ensure a solid foundation that will prepare them for the future.

As the New York State government plans for the future, I hope it will think about including plans to support the development of a quality child care system that will create both short term and long term success for our youngest learners and their families. During this budget cycle we urge you to:

- Restore funding for Child Care Resource and Referral services
- Restore funding to the Infant and Toddler Initiative.
- Invest in QUALITYstarsNY
- Increase funding for Child Care Subsidies

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments to you.