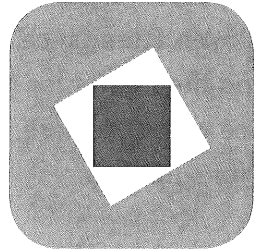


14



early care &
Learning COUNCIL

New York's child care resource network

Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2016-2017 Executive Budget Proposal: Human Services

Submitted by
David Voegele
Executive Director

February 9, 2016

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 community-based organizations that provide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services. The Early Care & Learning Council is also a leader within *Winning Beginning NY*, the State's early care and development coalition and fully supports the coalition 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.

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. Quality child care is a necessity for both children and their parents. New York State continues to fall short in meeting the need for financial assistance with child care, with thousands of income-eligible families on a formal and informal waiting list for subsidies.

This year we call on the legislature to:

- 1) Invest an additional \$190 million dollars in child care
 - **\$90 million** so that no current children lose child care subsidies as NYS implements new health, safety, and quality initiatives mandated by the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) , and
 - **\$100 million** to maintain slots
 - in the face of market rate increases due in June of 2016;
 - as New York implements the expanded eligibility rules required by the CCDBG which are effective October 1, 2016, which will provide 12 months of eligibility regardless of income, guaranteed child care for homeless families and payment for absences.

The recently reauthorized federal Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) contains health, safety, and quality requirements. These mandated regulations protect children and increase the safety and quality of New York's child care for working families and their children, but there is a cost.

According to estimates by the Division of the Budget, the costs of implementing only the health and safety components that are federally required will exceed \$90 million in the early years of implementation. Without taking into account the changes to the subsidy system, simply meeting the increased health and safety requirements of background checks, additional inspections and CPR and first aid training, cost are estimated at approximately \$90 million. The implications of meeting the new requirements while maintaining the number of children served AND the quality of the services provided, are daunting.

Without increased funding, this could translate into a loss of care for tens of thousands of children statewide who are currently being served. New York will need to take significant fiscal, legislative and administrative actions to meet several CCDBG provisions. The vast majority of children in working families in New York who are eligible for childcare subsidies are unserved due to insufficient funding. Without an increase in the state's investment, parents' ability to provide financial stability for their family and a supportive learning environment for their children is being seriously undermined.

New York's economy depends on quality child care. The regulated child care sector in New York State is a \$4.7 billion dollar industry. It provides nearly 120,000 jobs. Access to the organized child care market can increase labor force participation and support state and regional economic growth. Strengthened investment in child care will allow Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) to continue to provide consumer education and critical family supports to currently underserved parents across New York State and to assist the child care professionals as they work to improve the quality of their programs.

As the new and strengthened components of the law are implemented and parents continue to seek access to child care of high quality that is affordable and supports their child's healthy growth and development, NY State's Child Care Resource and Referral Network plays a critical role as providers of:

- Consumer Education
- Family Engagement
- Technical Assistance
- Infant and Toddler Services
- Professional Development/Training

To thousands of parents, child care providers and employers throughout New York State, CCR&Rs are a key component to the complex child care delivery system. During the critical first years of life that are the foundation for learning, child care is where early learning and school preparation happens for many children. Therefore, as New York continues to build on its investments focused on improving education and key programs that help prepare children for school, there must also be a commitment to increasing access to quality child care.

- 2) Please maintain the Executive's \$5 million investment in strengthening the quality of early learning through the implementation of QUALITYstarsNY. Additional funds are needed to expand the program and continue quality improvement activities through the CCR&R network.
- 3) Please continue to invest in a robust system of afterschool programs that provide care for children at the most critical hours of the day. Nearly 30% of referrals provided by CCR&Rs are for afterschool care.

Child care is both an infrastructure support for children, for families and for communities, and an avenue for building a strong New York State future. Parents need affordable care that supports their ability to work. Children need early childhood programs that provide a developmentally appropriate early learning experience with a workforce that is both educated and

appropriately compensated. And, communities need high quality services to attract and support businesses. But in New York State, there are still too few families that have access to high quality, affordable child care. A recent report by the Child Care Aware of America cites the cost of child care in New York as among the highest in the nation. Yet, New York State does not provide sufficient financial support to parents who cannot easily afford child care. Funding for child care has remained stagnant over the years, despite the economic hardships families are facing and the increasing rate of inflation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments to you. The Early Care & Learning Council and our network look forward to continuing to effectively serving the families and communities of New York State.