



Early Care & Learning Council

United to Promote Quality

Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2017-2018 Executive Budget Proposal: Human Services

Submitted by
Meredith Chimento
Executive Director

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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 community-based organizations that provide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services.

Child care is an infrastructure support for children, for families and for communities. NY State's Child Care Resource and Referral Network plays a critical role to assist families, child care providers, and local communities to ensure that families have access to high quality child care that meets the needs of working parents and the developmental needs of children.

The Early Care & Learning Council is leader within *Winning Beginning NY*, the State's early care and development coalition, as well as the Empire State Campaign for Child Care. We stand with these groups in asking the Governor for \$100 million in funding for child care. We are also

fully supportive of the proposals set forth by the First 1,000 Days on Medicaid initiative and of the Board of Regents Early Childhood Workgroup Blue Ribbon Committee including funding for locally based strategies that will strengthen communities and promote early literacy. Furthermore, our organization is united with our colleagues all around state in the Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York movement.

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.

Each day our CCR&R agencies help families navigate the barriers to finding high quality child care. These include the high cost, limited access to child care subsidies and the lack of availability of programs that operate during the hours parents need.

In 2017 the Early Care and Learning Council collected stories from parents and providers around the state regarding their child care experiences. I would like to share two of those stories with you today.

Khristina, a mom in Erie County, told us:

“In Spring 2014, I was notified that the daycare in which I had my children enrolled was closing permanently in less than one month. I felt I had to scramble to secure childcare for my soon-to-be school-age child and my toddler as summer was quickly approaching and most programs are filled by then. The owners of the closing facility did their best to help make the transition smooth; however, the facility they partnered with was much more expensive and had an extremely high turnover rate. I rarely saw the same face(s) at drop off and pick up, and my children weren't able to tell me which teacher(s) they spent time with that day because they were moved so often throughout the day. I rely on a daycare facility that opens before 7 am and doesn't close until 6 pm due to working almost 20 miles from the daycare facility. For 2016, the charges for my preschooler and my school-ager (for summer camp) combined totaled over \$11,200.00. As a single mom with no child support or additional income, I often wonder how it's possible to pay that much. My income exceeds the maximum allowable rate for state benefits. I have no alternative. I have to work to be able to support myself and my children, and in order to work, I must have reliable, safe childcare.”

Mark, a child care provider in Oswego County told us:

“How is it that someone flipping a burger can make more than a person caring for a child? Does the term 'you get what you pay for' apply to this? Of course it does. There is a limit to the amount

most parents can afford to pay thus limiting a fair and appropriate wage for the daycare worker. Yet in New York state lead teachers must have an educational background at their own expense, and in the end make just a little over minimum wage. There is very little incentive to go into childcare, but it is such a vital and important necessity of life. I can say that as a daycare director we are always on the brink of not making it with financing and quality staff. Without help it would seem that all private childcare is in threat of extinction.”

According to the 2017 report “Parents and High Cost of Child Care by Child Care Aware of America”, New Yorkers pay an average annual cost of \$15,028 for infant care in a child care center and an average annual cost of \$10,972 for infant care in a family child care home based program. The report also ranks New York as the least affordable state for families with a 4-year-old in center-based care.¹

For these reasons, we call on the New York Legislature and Governor Cuomo to increase our State investment in child care by at least \$100 million in 2018. This investment can be drawn from several different areas of the budget and should be directed specifically to:

1. Increase State funding to counties for child care subsidies by \$31 million* in order to:
 - a. maintain the Governor’s restoration of \$7 million to the child care subsidy program which would bring funding back to the 2016-2017 level as well as adjust for two years of 2% inflation; and
 - b. assist counties that regularly exhaust their child care funding allocations before meeting the needs of all eligible families, to expand the number of qualified families served.

2. Increase State funding further to stabilize the child care workforce and infrastructure, and to ensure equitable access to quality care. Specifically, the state should:
 - a. Re-instate the 75th percentile formula to establish reimbursement rates expected to change in June 2018. Reimbursement rates have been essentially flat funded since 2015; and
 - b. allocate funds to assist child care centers and group family day care providers that receive child care subsidies to cover increased wage costs as the new minimum wage standard is implemented across the state.

¹ Parents and High Cost of Child Care https://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017_CCA_High_Cost_Report_FINAL.pdf

3. Direct a portion of Economic Development funding dollars to further reduce the number of qualified families who are currently denied subsidy assistance, and to stabilize the child care workforce.

If directed toward expanding access to quality child care, such investment can remove barriers to broad workforce participation, support worker productivity, and bolster the local child care industry.

4. Increase State funding for the Child Care Facilitated Enrollment Projects in order to expand access to subsidies available to working families at higher income eligibility levels.

5. Expand and adjust the child and dependent care tax credit for maximum benefit. Adjusting the CDCTC to be allocated on a monthly or quarterly basis will help low-income families who live paycheck to paycheck to cover the costs of child care.

As we begin 2018 with Paid Family Leave, New York is now a national leader mandating eight weeks of paid leave that give parents the opportunity to bond with their children during those crucial first two months. However, after parents return to work they are often in a bind, faced with child care costs that they cannot afford. By supporting local government through subsidies and more substantial tax credits, New York can ensure that parents can stay working while their children are learning and growing.

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.