



Early Care & Learning Council

United to Promote Quality

Joint Legislative Public Hearing: 2019-2020 Executive Budget Proposal Human Services

Submitted by
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and input on the proposed budget for New York State. The Early Care & Learning Council (ECLC) and our network of 35 Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies provide direct assistance and support to parents, child care providers, and employers in all 62 counties.

Child care is an infrastructure support for children, for families and for communities, and its availability is essential to a healthy economy. High quality child care and early education for New York's children translates into a more prepared workforce which is a fundamental aspect of long term business growth. Across New York State the quality of child care programs varies. Our lack of enough high quality, affordable and accessible child care options puts us at a competitive disadvantage in the global economy.

To address this, ECLC and the CCR&R network utilize experienced, credentialed and highly effective professional development staff who provide quality training, best practices and support to child care providers. The CCR&R Network has the connection to the local child care providers and the knowledge of regional needs, challenges and opportunities facing families, while also having the early childhood expertise and knowledge of best practices.

For 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. Research confirms that the first years of life are the foundation for learning and child care is where early education and school preparation happens for many children. As New York continues to build on its investments focused on improving education and programs that help prepare children for school, there must also be a commitment to increasing access to quality child care.

In order to do this, there must be support for CCR&R agencies. Contracts with the Office of Children and Family Services have remained flat for over a decade, and in fact were cut in 2012. At that time minimum wage was \$7.25 an hour, yet the cost of living was not much less than it is today. In many cases, CCR&Rs have been forced to hold already low wages stagnant. Yet the role of CCR&R staff person is complex and individuals need to be an expert in multiple areas. For example, a parent counselor needs to be versed in local resources, quality standards and early childhood education best practices. This leads to burnout, which leads to staff turnover, and the ability to reach child care programs is impacted. In addition to work with parents, each year CCR&Rs work with tens of thousands of licensed, registered and legally-exempt child care programs.

Like child care staff and educators themselves, the overwhelming majority of CCR&R staff are female. In order to reach real pay equality, the specialized and necessary work of the CCR&R

agencies must be compensated. \$2.5 million is needed to support the Early Care & Learning Council and the Child Care Resource & Referral Network as we deliver critical services to boost the quality of child care.

In addition to quality issues in the child care system as a whole, in much of the state the available supply of providers caring for infants and toddlers is near capacity at 90%. In some urban areas, nearly all existing care is being utilized, and long wait lists occur. This acute shortage in care creates a situation where parents cannot go to work or children are being placed in child care that does not meet their development needs.

Therefore, we are requesting an additional \$2.5 million dollars to provide business development, implementation and project oversight to establish new child care businesses. These newly created small businesses will help stimulate local economies. High quality early child care and education for New York's children translates into a more prepared workforce which is a fundamental aspect of business growth.

With \$2.5 million additional dollars, CCR&Rs can hire additional staff to recruit and support new providers to serve infants and toddlers, particularly in regions where there are child care deserts, or areas and communities with limited or no access to quality child care.

Dedicated funding is necessary to address this need and create a new supply of high-quality child care providers across New York State. An investment by the state would allow CCR&Rs to develop intensive recruitment programs and ensure that Provider Specialists are available to assist with child care program development. This strategy paves a pathway to pay equity and self-sufficiency for women who opt to work from home caring for children. New child care providers will earn more money by serving more children and families.

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 for additional funding for child care subsidies in order for low income families to have equitable access to high quality child care. In Federal Fiscal Year 2017 approximately 182,000 children in 112,000 families received child care subsidies.¹ Many other families were eligible for support, but were not able to receive it due to funding constraints. As the Child Care Availability Task Force works on a systemic solution to the child care crisis, the State must increase investment now to restore short-term stability to both the child care provider and

¹ <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/childcare/factsheet/2017-DCCS-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

subsidy systems, and to expand access to subsidies for low-income working families whose ability to participate in the work force depends on securing quality care for their children.

Additionally, our organization is united with our human services sector colleagues all around state in the Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York movement.

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