



Early Care & Learning Council

United to Promote Quality

Joint Legislative Public Hearing: FY 2021 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. The National Survey of Children's Health shows that about 2 million families with a child 0-5 had a parent quit a job, not take a job or greatly change a job in the past year because of child care problems.

Nearly 900,000 of New York's children under the age of six will spend some time in child care outside the home.¹ Study after study proves that those who receive high-quality child care are more likely to succeed in school and life. Yet, we know that the child care system in NYS is in crisis, a reality that CCR&Rs professionals are confronted with every day.

For thousands of parents, child care providers and employers throughout New York State, CCR&Rs are the pathway through the complex child care system. In 2018, CCR&Rs received 40,495 requests for child care. 502 Homeless/in-shelter families received referrals from CCR&Rs. Over the past year we have made strides to improve the quality of infant and toddler child care through the significant investment the federal government has earmarked in the Child Care Development Block Grant quality set-aside. This investment proves what can be accomplished when young children and families are prioritized. We hope that New York State will build on this investment with an investment of its own. I am proud to serve on the Governor's Child Care Availability Task Force, which is poised to recommend a bold, comprehensive plan to create a high quality child care system that will be accessible to all. Yet, I am disappointed that the Executive Budget does not contain any investment that would bring us closer to the vision.

Quality child care is possible with the right support, investment and professional development. ECLC and the CCR&R network provide experienced, credentialed and highly effective professional development.

¹ American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

In New York State, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies work with tens of thousands of licensed, registered and legally-exempt child care programs each year. They are the “glue” that holds the child care industry together through their support of child care providers, parents, businesses and local governments. The level of expertise CCR&Rs provide is invaluable, yet it has been underfunded for the last decade.

CCR&R 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. Next year the minimum wage will reach \$15 per hour for much of the state, while the overall cost of living is much higher. With increasing overhead, CCR&Rs have been forced to keep already low wages stagnant. In a field where the overwhelming majority are women, this is perpetuating the pay gap. In order to reach real pay equality, the specialized and necessary work of the CCR&R agencies must be compensated. In recent months, CCR&Rs have been experiencing a familiar problem: several longtime staff members have left to work for better compensated, yet similar, positions with other state funded agencies.

The CCR&R Network has the connection to the local child care providers and the knowledge of regional needs, challenges and opportunities facing families. Through the collaboration of two ECLC staff trainers and 27 CCR&R trainers at 20 CCR&Rs, 66 capacity building events were held to strengthen our field.

CCR&Rs provide technical assistance to providers within their catchment area. Technical assistance can take the form of “basic technical assistance,” which includes short, question-specific information primarily through phone and e-mail. It can also take the form of “intensive technical assistance,” which is provided primarily at the provider’s site. This form of technical assistance is more in-depth and typically includes the development of a quality improvement plan. In 2017-2018 CCR&Rs provided 37,492 hours of basic technical assistance and 19,252 of intensive technical assistance.

CCR&R staff are professionals with expertise in local resources, parent engagement, quality standards and early childhood education best practices. They are tasked with serving families who are in need of early childhood services and with supporting the child care community which is facing a growing crisis. In order to reach real pay equality, the specialized and necessary work of the CCR&R agencies must be compensated. CCR&R staff are in a unique position to both shape and navigate a struggling industry, but the fact that many are struggling themselves cannot be lost.

\$5 million is needed from general funds 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. This amount represents the funding level our agencies would be at if the 2012 cut was restored and Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) had been added to subsequent contract cycles. With this increase in funding CCR&Rs will position themselves to work with both existing childcare providers and new providers to build the supply of quality care, specifically focusing on the lack of infant and toddler care in NYS. 60% of NYS has been classified as a child care desert. The Regional Economic Development Council's are working with CCR&Rs around the state to prioritize child care in their plans and increase the supply of care to NY's working families. However, CCR&Rs themselves are underfunded and are desperately in need of additional funding to support this work.

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 2018 approximately 180,000 children in 107,000 families received child care subsidies.² 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 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.

We also stand with our many partners in the Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York campaign in their call for an investment in the human services sector.

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.

² <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/childcare/factsheet/2018-DCCS-Fact-Sheet.pdf>