



# New York Association for the Education of Young Children

Testimony for the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services

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Submitted by: Kristen Kerr, Executive Director

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Kristen Kerr, the Executive Director of the New York Association for the Education of Young Children. Our mission is to promote excellence in early care and education for New York State children and families through education, advocacy and the support of the profession.

As a statewide membership organization of over 3,000, we represent a workforce which shapes the lives of New York's youngest children, from birth through age eight. These members work across settings: in child care centers, their own homes, churches, colleges, Head Starts, and elementary schools. They are an integral part of their communities, ensuring that parents can work with the peace of mind that their children are safe, learning, and well cared for. However, our economy cannot reach its full potential when the workforce it relies on operates in the confines of a broken system in a state of market failure.

After decades of asking whether high quality early education “works” for young children, it is time to shift our focus to what works best and how we can support it. **Children are always learning – wherever they are, in every environment.** Our task is to ensure that those environments are conducive to their success, no matter what their parents are able to afford. With the help of the Excelsior Scholarship, New York is beginning to reduce the burden the cost of college places on students and their parents. Yet our current child care system expects new parents, often with student loans of their own, to make ends meet while paying out of pocket for child care that may cost more than college tuition. As we advocate for change at the federal level, we cannot afford to wait for Congress to act. New York's children, families, and early childhood educators need us now. Today we join with member organizations of Winning Beginning NY and the Empire State Campaign for Child Care to ask the Legislature to **commit to achieving universal access to quality, affordable child care by 2025.**

Our educators are passionate. They often remain in our field for decades because caring for and teaching young children is what they love, but many do so at great personal cost. Failure to devote adequate funding to the early childhood education workforce leads directly to spending on public income supports on the back end. **An alarming 65% of New York's early educators in child care settings rely on supports** such as SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, and the Earned

Income Tax Credit.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, rates of participation for early educators are double the rates for workers across all occupations.<sup>2</sup> We know that people in poverty, who experience instability in food, housing, and other financial insecurity are often distracted, depressed, and experience diminished cognitive performance.<sup>3</sup> We then ask this poverty-stricken workforce to educate and nurture our youngest children, and they rise to the challenge for families across New York every day.

Children learn better when they are in settings led by highly educated teachers and caregivers with a deep understanding of early childhood development.<sup>4</sup> The creation of the **Child Care Worker Scholarship** last year was a first step in overcoming barriers to the Excelsior Scholarship for nontraditional students, such as those in the early education workforce, who can only attend higher education part time as they work and care for families of their own. We ask that the Legislature ensure that this scholarship has its own dedicated funding, so students at **all eligible SUNY and CUNY schools** are able to participate.

Additionally, this scholarship must meet the needs of early educators across settings, and accommodate for the vibrant linguistic diversity of our workforce.<sup>5</sup> In New York State, 41% of aides/assistants and 24% of teachers in child care settings speak a language other than English.<sup>6</sup> **Failure to meet the higher education needs of linguistically diverse early educators would result in a workforce that is less representative of the children and families of our state.** In the future, we also hope to see funding that mitigates barriers to higher education for our diverse workforce that extend beyond tuition, such as the cost of books, reliable transportation, child care, and high speed internet access.

The ability to pursue a bachelor's degree part time without accruing debt will empower the women of our field to make economically sound choices for themselves and their families while improving outcomes for the young children they serve. However, higher education alone is not enough to solve the problem of high turnover. Retaining our best early educators is critical to maintaining their relationships with young children and families. High levels of turnover undermine those relationships, creating unease in children and a burden on administrators. A recent study of early childhood educator turnover rates by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute found that nationally, **turnover ranges from 26% to 40% of staff per year.**<sup>7</sup> This rate is highest in

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<sup>1</sup> "Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018: New York" *Center for the Study of Child of Child Care Employment*, University of California, Berkeley, [cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/2018-Index-New-York.pdf](https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/2018-Index-New-York.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> "Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018. Executive Summary." *Center for the Study of Child of Child Care Employment*, University of California, Berkeley, [cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/1-Executive-Summary.pdf](https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/1-Executive-Summary.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Mani, A., et al. "Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function." *Science*, vol. 341, no. 6149, 2013, pp. 976–980., doi:10.1126/science.1238041.

<sup>4</sup> Institute of Medicine and National Research Council. 2015. "Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation." Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

<sup>5</sup> Katz, Anne, and Aaron Loewenberg. *Putting Degrees Within Reach*. New America, [www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/putting-degrees-within-reach/](http://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/putting-degrees-within-reach/).

<sup>6</sup> "Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018. About the Workforce." *Center for the Study of Child of Child Care Employment*, University of California, Berkeley, [cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/2-About-the-Workforce.pdf](https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/2-About-the-Workforce.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, Amy M, et al. *Early Childhood Teacher Turnover in Nebraska*. Buffet Early Childhood Institute, Dec. 2018, [bit.ly/2JSKcL0](http://bit.ly/2JSKcL0).

child care settings, with 58% of child care administrators identifying salary as “the reason teachers typically leave.”<sup>8</sup>

As the minimum wage increases, we have seen an already dire problem worsen. Wage compression has diminished minimal wage differences between new aides and assistants and veteran early educators with advanced degrees. **All workers deserve an adequate living wage**, and early educators who dedicate years to pursuing higher education and remain in the field deserve a wage ladder that compensates them fairly in addition to that living wage, just like any other occupation. Raising New York recently found that current annual **lead teacher** salaries average around \$30,000 outside of NYC and \$43,000 in NYC, the equivalent of \$14.50/hour and \$20/hour respectively.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, for the early childhood workforce there is a wage penalty associated with choosing to work in care and education of infants and toddlers. When early educators attain degrees they tend to move into pre-kindergarten and elementary education out of financial necessity. Babies and toddlers need increased investment to make sure our brightest educators and child care providers are not forced to leave them in favor of better paying work.

Caring for infants and toddlers requires fewer children for each adult, and is therefore more expensive to provide. These low ratios must be maintained, as they are critical to healthy development. From 2011 to 2017 infant/toddler capacity per 100 children declined for all but the top 20% wealthiest of communities in New York.<sup>10</sup> The Center for American Progress emphasizes that states should “provide supports to ensure home-based care can be a financially sustainable business” to increase supply of infant and toddler care.<sup>11</sup> Yet the recent Raising New York survey found that many programs are running at a deficit, and “Child care providers who enroll at least one child with a subsidy are more likely to have a deficit (30%) than those who do not (14%).”<sup>12</sup> **The current market rate for subsidy is too low to provide high quality care for the families who need it most.** In fact, it is too low for programs who accept subsidy to remain financially solvent.

New York can take several **concrete action steps to facilitate access to affordable child care for immigrant families.** The National Resource Center on Hispanic Children and Families recently released a report that highlights state policies that could improve access to Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) money for Hispanic families.<sup>13</sup> These actions would significantly

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<sup>8</sup> Roberts, Amy M, et al. *Early Childhood Teacher Turnover in Nebraska*. Buffet Early Childhood Institute, Dec. 2018, bit.ly/2JSKcL0.

<sup>9</sup> “The Capacity Crisis: Time to Invest in High-Quality Infant and Toddler Care.” *Raising NY*, Dec. 2019. raisingnewyork.org/the-capacity-crisis

<sup>10</sup> “The Capacity Crisis: Time to Invest in High-Quality Infant and Toddler Care.” *Raising NY*, Dec. 2019. raisingnewyork.org/the-capacity-crisis

<sup>11</sup> Workman, Simon, and Steven Jessen-Howard. *Understanding the True Cost of Child Care for Infants and Toddlers*. Center for American Progress, 15 Nov. 2018, www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/11/15/460970/understanding-true-cost-child-care-infants-toddlers/.

<sup>12</sup> “The Capacity Crisis: Time to Invest in High-Quality Infant and Toddler Care.” *Raising NY*, Dec. 2019. raisingnewyork.org/the-capacity-crisis

<sup>13</sup> Gennetian, Lisa, et al. *How State-Level Child Care Development Fund Policies May Shape Access and Utilization among Hispanic Families*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families, Jan. 2019, www.hispanicresearchcenter.org/publications/how-state-level-child-care-development-fund-policies-may-shape-access-and-utilization-among-hispanic-families/.

improve access for non-Hispanic immigrant families as well. One simple step is providing child care subsidy applications online, in English and other prevalently spoken languages. Explicitly stating on the application that Social Security numbers for the entire household are optional can increase completion and submission rates. Many families do not complete the application because they fear exposing a member of their household's immigration or citizenship status. Similarly, prioritizing families who receive Temporary Assistants for Needy Families (TANF) precludes access to immigrant families because TANF documentation requirements are more rigorous. Taking these steps as a part of more comprehensive, culturally responsive systems change can ensure that – in recognition of the current administration's efforts to restrict access – New York's immigrant families have access to essential public supports.

High quality early learning and child care experiences for all of New York's children must occur in a system that values early childhood educators and child care providers as the workforce that prepares children for bright futures while their parents work. As a member of the Governor's Child Care Availability Task Force, the Winning Beginning New York steering committee, and the Empire State Campaign for Child Care, we share in the deep concern that Governor Cuomo included no new state investments in child care in his Executive Budget. We urge the Legislature to include the following investments in your one-house bills and work with the Executive to ensure the following commitments and investments are included in New York's 2020-2021 final enacted budget:

1. New York **commits to achieving universal access to quality, affordable child care by 2025**; and
2. To set New York on a path to meeting the goal of universal access, and to curb the loss of providers and the exodus of educators from the field while working toward this goal, **New York makes significant building block investments in child care this year**, including:
  - a. **Investing at least \$40M to create a fund to increase workforce compensation and improve child care quality.** Low compensation for child care educators leaves many educators living in or near poverty. It also leads to high workforce turnover rates, causing instability for infants and young children who need consistency in caregivers in order to establish healthy and secure attachments. Priority should be given to programs that serve low-income families and care for infants and toddlers; and
  - b. **At least \$60 million in the state's child care subsidy program to expand access to more working families by making eligibility levels and co-pays more fair and uniform across the state.** At present, because there are not enough resources to serve all working families eligible for child care assistance, some counties cut off eligibility to families earning as little as \$27,729 (130% of poverty, family of

3). At the same time, some counties, again because of inadequate funding, must set co-pays that are so high (exceeding \$600 per month in numerous counties) that many families cannot afford to accept a subsidy. **This investment would enable more working families to** access quality child care this year, and lay the groundwork for the state to develop a model child care system that provides all New York families access to quality, affordable child care.

Thank you for considering our budget requests. We look forward to continuing to work with you to support the early childhood workforce of New York.