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Joint Legislative Budget Hearing - Elementary Education

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Good morning members of the New York State Legislature. My name is Antonia Ferraro Martinelli. I am a parent of three children and a member of the Community Education Council in District 15 Brooklyn. Thank you for holding these hearings today on the State Education Budget.

Last week Governor Cuomo released his proposed 2022 executive budget which offers a bleak future for our students unless New York receives \$15 billion in federal stimulus aid. In the absence of federal aid, schools could face more than \$2 billion in cuts. Our schools have faced a year like no other. They've implemented social distancing requirements and complex schedules all in the face of severe staffing and funding issues. I have watched our schools scramble to provide technology and food to students. I have watched schools hit roadblocks as they try to hire essential staff due to withholding of register growth money and withholding of exemptions from the hiring freeze. The withholding of money from the city and state to our DOE has had direct, negative impacts on our children in schools. I am here today to impress upon you that NYC parents and children can wait no longer for these resources.

Allow me to list some budgetary concerns.

- **Fund C4E to the full legal requirement.** - This budget only maintains the \$18.4 million allocated last year. NYC students will only receive \$8 million in Foundation Aid when they are legally owed over \$1.1 billion
- **Additional funding for early childhood literacy that focuses on decoding and fluency.**- Children with dyslexia, in particular, are not well-served system wide.
- **Mandate a guidance counselor at every school.** - Students have faced the Covid crisis without support. Schools are facing an influx of students in temporary housing that need additional support.
- **Technology replacement funding** - When our city went into lockdown last year, our schools distributed all their in-house ipads and laptops. All of this tech needs to be replaced by the fall. Will the \$2 billion Smart Schools Bond Act support this need?
- **Infrastructure upgrade funding** - Schools need sufficient capacity to manage advanced technology and other needs (internet connections to schools, wifi onsite)

- **Free Wi-Fi for All** - Our schools must ensure all families with Pre-K-12 students have access to free Wi-Fi. Internet access has become integral to education in the same way busing is integral. Schools must be mandated to offer a free Wi-Fi option to all families.
- **Food** - In light of the impact of COVID we must continue free food for all families and in all communities with appropriate funding statewide. I have spent some time working at a weekend food pantry and I have seen a wide cross section of the community on those lines, including many children, parents and grandparents.
- **CRSE and SEL** - Mandatory workshops in CRSE (*Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education*) and SEL (*Social Emotional Learning*) for all teacher certification applicants. We are a diverse city in a diverse state under a diverse nation. If we have learned anything from the last four years, it should be that education must train us to understand and respect each other's differences so that we may see the commonalities.
- **Repeal the mandate to provide rent-free space to Charter Schools.** - *Section 3602 Subdivision 6-G of New York State Education Law* mandates that the NYC Department of Education provide Charter Schools with rent-free space in DOE facilities or pay market-rate rents for private facilities in the borough of the Charter School's choice. This requirement applies exclusively to Charters located in NYC. The Executive Budget proposes to eliminate State's reimbursement to NYC for the cost of charter school rental assistance in order to encourage the use of available co-located space within public facilities. This section of the charter law and the governor's proposal are incredibly unfair to NYC. Throughout the pandemic, our city and schools have suffered indifference and neglect from the state and federal government, while charter schools have enriched themselves on forgivable federal PPP loans. NYC parents have experienced dissatisfaction with co-locations. We know that our children suffer significant loss of resources in co-located buildings. The state authorizes these charters. They invite the charter schools to dinner, but NYC pays the tab. Under these dire financial circumstances NYC must be able to charge rent to charters on DOE space.
- **Do not reissue Zombie Charters!** - The FY 2022 Executive Budget proposes to authorize the reissuance of any charter originally issued to a charter school that has subsequently closed due to surrender, revocation, termination or non-renewal. As the governor highlights in his budget summary, citywide enrollment is declining. This is not the time to authorize new experiments that drain already dwindling per-pupil funds. This is the time to bolster and fully resource public schools.
- **Create more permanent revenue streams.** - The FY 2022 Executive Budget only implements a temporary surcharge on the wealthiest New Yorkers to raise \$1.5 billion. Our governor is timid about taxation because he believes the wealthy will leave, but the reality is, wealthy residents left NYC because our city's public services stopped functioning, not because of new expenses. If NY is to achieve an economic recovery, it

must implement progressive tax policy that invests in all our public resources, including public schools. Our children's futures cannot be contingent on federal action.

Thank you again for allowing me to offer my testimony today. I hope I was able to illustrate the dire needs of our public schools, teachers and students, as I have observed them in my capacity on CEC15.