



New York Association for the Education of Young Children

Testimony for the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Our mission at the New York Association for the Education of Young Children (NYAEYC) 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 organization with over 3,000 members in the field of early education and care, we work on behalf of the essential workforce that has been the backbone of New York's economy by supporting all other essential workers through the course of the pandemic.

In our [2021 testimony](#), we presented the policy implications of the findings of our two 2020 surveys of hundreds of child care providers from across New York State. Most of the problems detailed in this testimony remain relevant today. Following our 2021 testimony, our advocacy with New York's congressional delegation and Senators contributed to the passage of \$50 billion in funding for child care in the American Rescue Plan Act. As a result, [at the time of writing](#), OCFS has delivered six months of stabilization grant payments to 14,886 approved child care providers. Temporary relief was essential to staving off a tidal wave of permanent program closures – though an estimated 1,500 programs have closed over the course of the pandemic – but without permanent funding it has only delayed the inevitable. As we hope to demonstrate through this testimony, **six months of stability is not enough to correct for a dysfunctional child care system facing decades of underfunding and neglect.**

In September 2021, we followed up on 2020's surveys with a survey of approximately 500 child care providers from across New York State in English and Spanish in order to better understand how the process of applying for stabilization funds had worked for them, how they were using these funds, and what the grant meant to them. The quotes in this testimony are reactions to the question "In your own words, what will these stabilization funds mean for your program?" For Tiffany Diaz from the Bronx, stabilization grants meant **"Survival of my program. Survival of the child care industry. Survival for my staff. Survival for my family."** In the stories they shared with us, New York's child care providers illustrate that temporary stabilization funds worked to stave off program closures, prevent rate increases for parents, and create healthier environments for children with better-compensated staff. Now, they rely on the State Legislature to recognize this important work – performed and led largely by women and women of color in particular – with permanent investment.

We join with our coalition partners in the Empire State Campaign for Child Care to ask for **an investment of \$5 billion** in this year's budget to put New York on **a clear path to achieving universal child care**. Only a universal system that offers high quality care to all

families who want it can achieve equity for New York's families regardless of work, immigration status, housing, and zip code. In turn, high quality can never be achieved through parent fees alone – it can only be achieved by permanent investment in the early childhood profession, providing this crucial workforce with a good wage and benefits.

Parents Cannot Afford the True Cost of Child Care

“Tuition costs are way too high for parents to cover all costs of childcare, so **this additional funding has allowed us to continue to provide a quality program while also keeping tuition prices accessible for parents.**”

— Leslie Ball, Owner of JLU Child Care in Spencerport, NY

“These funds mean that 65 children will be able to remain in care without interruption, but **without it would mean having to increase already-high tuition for parents who are already struggling.**”

— Erika Perez, Owner/Director of Victoria's Castle Daycare in New Windsor, NY

Child care providers know that parents can't afford to pay more, but the reality is that the work cannot be done for less. Parents and providers should not feel as though their needs are at odds when they are both working in the best interest of children. In recognition of this hardship, we ask the State Legislature to **immediately increase subsidy eligibility levels to 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL) for all New York families** with children from infancy to school age, **regardless of employment, immigration status, or any other factor.** This is an important first step to achieving a universal system that is free or affordable for all of New York's families.

Moving Away from the Market Rate

“While we will make excellent use of the funds they are only a band-aid, temporarily restoring some stabilization. The larger issue relates to the true cost of providing quality care and the fact that it isn't affordable for families as is, in addition **subsidized tuition often only covers about 65% of the actual cost for a child** creating even deeper gaps. Long term subsidy investment and/or direct support of early care is vital to the survival of the professionalization.”

— Heather Mount, Executive Director, Coddington Road Community Center, Ithaca, NY

During many days of passionate and well-informed testimony from child care providers to OCFS as the Division of Child Care Services prepared to submit their plan for the Child Care and Development Block Grant to the federal government, the single loudest message was that **the market rate paid for each child receiving subsidy is far too low.** As we have established, child care programs recognize that parents cannot afford to pay enough to cover

the true cost of providing high quality child care and set their rates accordingly. Therefore, it is impossible for a survey based on the inadequate rates of family tuition to arrive at a funding level that is sufficient to provide high quality early learning experiences. New York State must transition to a cost-estimation model that accounts for geography, quality, and pay and benefit parity with K-12 educators. Additionally, with attendance remaining unpredictable, it is crucial to immediately move to a system that pays for enrollment rather than attendance.

We join with the Empire State Campaign for Child Care in calling for an **increase in child care provider reimbursement rates to reflect the true cost of care by investing \$600 million in this year's budget.**

An End to Personal Debt Keeping Programs Afloat

"I was living with my credit card and with this stabilization money I paid off my debt and now I can focus more on the kids and not my debt."

— Ingrid Rivas, Child Care Provider of Ingrid's Child Care in Rochester, NY

"The grant will allow me to pay my operating expenses while "getting ahead" on other debt and giving me a breather from feeling so pressured by debt collectors."

— Wendy Poyer, Owner/provider of Wendy Poyers Daycare in Whitney Point, NY

In last year's testimony, we shared the disturbing finding that 60% of New York's child care program directors and owners reported "putting supplies or other items on their personal credit card or dipping into their personal savings accounts, including 82% of family child care homes" ([NAEYC](#)). Subsequently, many programs used stabilization funds to pay down that debt. It is shameful that the personal savings and credit of women who work in one of the lowest-paying occupations are further used to subsidize the neglect of this system by the government. By failing to adequately fund child care, we prop up a system that expects women of color to give everything they have and more because they believe in the work they do for others.

Staffing Shortages Can Only Be Resolved With Dedicated Funding

"These stabilization funds were able to help us get the staffing we needed to expand our enrollment. Our local McDonalds is starting staff at \$18.50 an hour... It is very hard to compete with those types of wages when the amount we get a week for child care doesn't cover a minimum wage employee."

— Danielle Wright, NYAEYC member and Executive Director of E. John Gavras Center in Auburn, NY

“It has helped me recruit employees by offering more competitive wages, but it is still impossible to compete with the school district and their benefits.”

— Anonymous Center Director in Walden, NY

Every day, New York’s child care providers choose to continue in this work knowing that they could make more money doing almost anything else. Child care programs compete with other low-wage sectors such as retail, warehouses, and food service that are raising wages and offering perks in order to make up for staffing shortages. They also compete with the K-12 school system, which is able to offer stability and benefits no child care program can in the context of our market-based system. Our survey found that stabilization funds were far too low to meet the staffing needs of center-based programs, and while some were able to give small raises or bonuses, others used their grant to support keeping staff on at minimum wage as they struggled with lack of income.

The Governor’s Executive Budget proposal to invest \$75 million in this workforce of at least 70,000 is far too low. As part of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care, we ask that the Legislature **significantly raise child care workforce compensation** without raising costs for families by **investing at least \$500 million**. This must be part of a long-term commitment to achieving pay parity with K-12 educators. Without parity, turnover will continue at extremely high rates and it will remain impossible to retain staff with the higher education credentials that would enable them to provide high quality early education experiences to young children.

The Reality of Low Pay

“[Stabilization funds mean] I won’t become homeless.”

— Anonymous Family Child Care Provider

“The stabilization funds mean that **I can try to offer my staff an ethical wage for the first time ever**. It made me so sad to know that **my head teachers had to go to food pantries** to get food to feed their families during the pandemic. Although wages are still not where I’d like them to be, (my staff could make more money at Shoprite) we have a little bit more breathing room and everyone is happier which reflects in how we teach and how the children feel.”

— Feliz Quinlan, Director of Holy Name of Mary Montessori School in Croton-on-Hudson, NY

The reality of low pay as a child care provider is something I speak to from experience. As a toddler teacher, I earned minimum wage while playing, soothing tears, changing diapers, cleaning, and developing and implementing lesson plans with ten children under two and a half years old. I relied on my father’s health insurance, then Medicaid. I could not afford a car or my student loans. There was no path to a living wage. Every day, people like me are leaving work they love because they have no way to make ends meet. Every year that goes by without meaningful investment and a commitment to wholly transforming our system is one that

weakens what is left of New York's child care and takes advantage of the dedication of early childhood educators.

A Vision for the Future

“These funds give me hope that we will be okay and that we will survive this pandemic and economic tragedy. It allows me to breathe some and give me a bit of a break from the survival mode I have been in since March 2020. It will help me pay for my rent for the next 5 months and focus on actually caring for my staff and the children and families attending our program.”

— Glenda Villajuan, Director, CitiTots, Brooklyn

We are disappointed that the Governor's Executive Budget has made no progress towards achieving universal child care as a follow-up to her commitments as Co-Chair of the Child Care Availability Task Force. Stabilization funds provided much-needed hope to our state's child care providers, but what happens next is even more important. While we continue to work with our national partners to advocate for a federal solution to funding child care, we know that **New York State cannot afford to wait on Congress to act.** It is absolutely essential that the State Legislature invest \$5 billion and make a commitment to universal child care this year.

A fully funded transformative system of child care will tremendously improve the lives of young children, their families, and child care providers. When programs that serve low-income children can keep up with routine maintenance – fixing broken playgrounds, replacing old toys, repairing leaky roofs – children are healthier and happier. When staff are paid what they deserve, they can connect better with children and bring their best selves to work every day without the stress of poverty. When families no longer struggle to afford child care, a tremendous burden will be lifted. When child care is no longer trapped in a structure that does not work, businesses, communities, and our state economy will benefit.