



TESTIMONY

2023 JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET

HUMAN SERVICES

February 13, 2023

Oral testimony delivered by Kate Ryan, Executive Director of the Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance at Adirondack Foundation

Written testimony submitted by [Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance](#) at [Adirondack Foundation](#)

INTRODUCTION

The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance at Adirondack Foundation appreciates the opportunity to submit oral and written testimony to the 2023 Joint Budget Hearing on Human Services.

Our oral testimony is delivered by Kate Ryan, Executive Director of the Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance at Adirondack Foundation. Our written testimony is the collaborative work of our members reflecting the expertise and experience of child care providers, regional child care resource and referral agencies, businesses, municipalities and families. Founded in 2015, the Alliance connects a network of public and private sources that provide early childhood education, physical health, social-emotional development, and family support services, making it easier for providers and parents to find needed resources. We provide a needed forum for organizations and individuals committed to this work to share best practices, identify funding opportunities, and discuss and work together to solve common challenges. At the same time, our relationships across the region help us identify gaps, bridge services, and leverage community resources to improve early childhood services in our region.

The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance at Adirondack Foundation appreciates the opportunity to share with you our perspective on the 2023-24 Executive budget and recommendations for improving the system of child care and programs that support children and families.

EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Alliance appreciates the recent investments in child care and the Executive's budget desire to continue to support access to high quality affordable child care.

BUSINESS NAVIGATOR (\$1 million)

The Alliance supports the Executive budget's proposal to investing in a Business Navigator Program. Any assistance in supporting employee access to child care is needed. However, we hope that the funds are provided to Child Care Resource and Referral networks as they have the existing infrastructure and regional networks to best support employers and families.

EMPLOYER BASED CHILD CARE MODELS

The Alliance supports efforts to increase access to child care. We appreciate the Governor's recognition that child care is an economic development issue and is vital for both families and community partners. We appreciate her proposal to encourage businesses to assist families in securing child care.

While the Alliance appreciates the thoughtfulness of the Executive budget proposals, we are concerned that they do not address the two major reasons for the child care crisis, affordability

and capacity. In the Adirondacks we simply do not have enough providers to serve families. The following proposals advanced by the Alliance specifically address the need to invest in the recruitment and retention of high quality child care providers.

ALLIANCE: ENCOURAGES INVESTMENTS IN CHILD CARE IN THE ADIRONDACK REGION

When discussing any policy that has a statewide impact, it is important to recognize the diversity of our state and the need for an array of interventions to address the child care crisis affecting all of our communities.

The Adirondack region is home to approximately 192,000 people of whom 6,850 are three years of age or younger. Approximately 6,978 children (18.2%) birth to seventeen years of age live at or below the federal poverty level, as compared to 14.9% for the areas of the state outside of New York City. Median income for the region is \$10,000 less than the state average.

Adirondack communities have been talking about the child care crisis for many years. Prior to the pandemic, nearly 80% of our census tracts were considered child care deserts (three or more children per regulated child care slot.) Since then, we have lost over 1,200 more slots, or 25 percent of our capacity.

Only the larger population centers like Plattsburgh, Malone, Lake Placid, and Saranac Lake are not considered child care deserts. In these areas, center-based child care programs serve those living and working in the area. Beyond these, the sparsely populated areas are in extreme need for child care but are unable to support the enrollment needed for center-based programs. Therefore, family or group family child care is what is needed and sustainable. It requires 8 to 12 family and group child care providers to create 100 new slots. To simply restore the loss of slots due to the pandemic, our region needs to create 75 to 150 new family or group child care providers. To eliminate the number of census tracts considered child care deserts, we will need yet another 160-240 slots.

The Alliance believes there is great value in developing policies that address the affordability of high-quality child care. Investments in assistance programs are critical for families to have access to child care. However, in regions like the Adirondacks, investments in recruiting and onboarding new child care providers are essential. Additional investments are needed to support child care providers so access to high-quality programs is sustained for years to come.

CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL PROVIDERS (CCR&R)

Child care resource and referral providers are community based not-for-profit organizations dedicated to the support of child care. Embedded in our communities, CCR&Rs are uniquely positioned to provide supports to new and existing child care providers and assist families in identifying programs. CCR&Rs are stretched to their limits working without an increase in base

funding for over ten years. *The Alliance strongly encourages an increased investment in CCR&Rs base funding as they have not received an increase since 2012.*

It is understandable that, just like so many other programs, the funding formula for CCR&Rs is at least partially based on population, but the result is that the funding formula fails to recognize the specific needs and additional costs associated with addressing those needs in rural areas of the state. Specifically, CCR&Rs in the Adirondacks and other rural regions of the state simply do not have the capacity to recruit and support the large number of family and group family providers needed to get licensed or registered. Without additional support, child care deserts in those regions will never be eliminated.

The Alliance supports the Early Care and Learning Council's request for new state funding of \$7.9 million to support the Child Care Resource and Referral programs.

MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There is a need to invest in the development of trauma informed practices in classrooms that incorporate appropriate social emotional strategies implemented through racial equity and multi-generational poverty lenses. In 2019, the Infant/Toddler Mental Health Consultations project was launched to ensure early learning educators had access to professional and curriculum development supported by mental health professionals.

The need for Mental Health Consultations has only increased since the pandemic. Similar to concerns expressed by public school districts, young children first entering early learning programs are experiencing challenges. Families are looking to child care programs and preschool programs to provide interventions that will address their social emotional development. An increased investment would ensure that young children, ages 0-5 years, would have access to nurturing environments with the skills and resource to address social emotional and behavioral issues.

The Alliance supports the Early Care and Learning Council's request for \$4 million to support mental health consultants for children 0-5 years.

QUALITYstarsNY

The foundation for a high-quality early childhood education system rests on standards that are based on long-standing and current research that demonstrate how these standards lead to improved outcomes for children. Continuous quality improvement systems, like QUALITYstarsNY, provide the framework of support to programs, staff, and providers to achieve these standards and along the way supports the sustainability of the program. At the same time, they provide families with up-to-date information on the quality of programs in their community enabling them to choose programs that best meet their and their child's needs.

The Alliance supports QUALITYstarsNY's request for an investment of \$20 million (an increase of \$15 million).

ALLIANCE: ENCOURAGES INVESTMENTS IN FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

HELP ME GROW

Help Me Grow is a nationally recognized, evidenced-based model that improves outcomes and reduces disparities in early developmental health and family well-being. Help Me Grow currently operates in 17 counties throughout the state and is based in Western New York, Long Island, Monroe County/Finger Lakes, and Onondaga County. The Alliance hopes that as Help Me Grow

Help Me Grow is primary prevention at its finest. The HMG model works across sectors (health care, child care, human services) to promote child development, make developmental and social emotional screening universally available, and provide ongoing support for families to effectively navigate systems to access services. Help Me Grow is a proven prevention model that brings communities together to foster strong families and ensure that all children get the start they deserve.

The Alliance supports an investment of \$500,000 to enhance access to the Help Me Grow program.

CLOSING

A single strategy will not resolve the child care crisis and a single program will not support all families. The complex system of caring for children and supporting families to achieve their financial health and driving economic development in our communities needs significant change to be viable in the future. The proposals included in this testimony only address a fraction of the issues faced by rural regions of New York State. We appreciate the task before us and the opportunity to engage in this discussion with you and the larger coalition of stakeholders.

For more information, please contact Kate Ryan, Director at Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance at Adirondack Foundation at kate.ryan@adkfoundation.org.