

Testimony for Human Services Budget Hearing January 31, 2024

I have been researching and writing about childcare for the past 15 years. What is most shocking to me about this industry is that despite our societal reliance on child care, child care providers, including both center and home based providers, are expected to work for almost nothing, making many, nearly 50%, eligible for public benefits. The average wage for child care providers is less than \$17 an hour, approximately \$35,000 a year. I started my career as a child care provider and realized quickly that, unless I wanted to be impoverished, I needed to find other work to do. During the Covid epidemic, child care providers, largely women of color, were praised for their contributions. Now, they are being forgotten. For the past three years, the State of New York received money from the federal government that was allocated to provide workforce subsidies. Without continuing this support, many more will be forced to leave the industry. Between 2019-2022, there has already been a 20.9% reduction in the capacity of home care providers. Ninety percent of centers and 70% of home care providers report that they could provide more care if they could hire more workers.

At the same time, we already cannot meet the current demands for child care. As a result of the expansion of state eligibility criteria last year and expanded money for child care assistance, demand for child care will likely increase. However, there is no money in the current proposed state budget to help increase the wages of providers.

In addition to failing to support child care workers, the current proposed budget makes little effort to help families. There was no effort to allocate money toward separating parents work hours from the hours that their children are eligible for care (S.5327A (Brisport)/ A.4986A (Hevesi). There is no effort to allocate money to provide child care for children whose parents do not who do not work a minimum number of hours (A.1303(Clark)/S.4924(Ramos). Both can make it challenging for parents to enter the workforce and makes it challenging for many low income children to receive stable care. The application process also often takes more than 30 day causing parents who are technically eligible for child care assistance to forgo jobs. We need to allocate money to simplify the application process.

A bill was passed by the House and the Senate in January (S.5327A (Brisport)/ A.4986A Hevesi) but vetoed by the governor as a result of cost concerns. It has been reintroduced this session. We need to put this money in the budget.

Though the current proposed budget includes refundable tax credits for child care businesses, without workers, it will be difficult to set up a new child care businesses. This money should be re-allocated to directly help providers make a living wage, to simplify the application process and to decouple subsidized child care from parent work hours. Let's support the workers who care for our children and keep low and moderate income children in safe, stable care settings.

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