



Early Care & Learning Council

United to Promote Quality

Joint Legislative Public Hearing: FY 2026 Executive Budget Proposal Human Services

Submitted by
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and input on the proposed budget for New York State. Early Care & Learning Council (ECLC) and our network of 35 Child Care Resource Centers (CCRC) agencies provide direct assistance and support to parents, child care providers, and employers in all 62 counties. Child Care Resource Centers (CCRCs) serve as the Child Care Resource and Referral agencies for New York State. We are thankful to the Hochul Administration and the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) for their continuous support of our programs and recognition of the key role CCR&Rs play in the child care ecosystem.

Affordable, quality child care is essential for parents to be able to work and contribute to the economy. Yet, finding care is not an easy feat. For thousands of families, child care providers and employers throughout New York State, CCRCs are a key support in navigating the complex child care system. Each day, CCRCs help to open new child care programs, provide technical assistance to providers, and meet the needs of children in child care settings. In short, CCRCs are the workforce behind the child care workforce.

The CCRC Network has the connection to the local child care providers and the knowledge of regional needs, challenges and opportunities facing families, while also having the early childhood expertise and knowledge of best practices. ECLC is dedicated to impacting the lives of young children and their families to create a more equitable child care system.

ECLC and the CCRC network applaud Governor Hochul and her administration for the proposed initiatives to make child care more accessible and affordable in New York.

This starts with a proposal for a \$110 million Child Care Construction Fund. \$100 million for new construction in child care deserts, specifically with \$10 million set aside for repairs and renovations of family and group family child care, which will help struggling child care businesses stay afloat and increase the availability of care options for all. The network of CCRCs hears firsthand reports from the field each day that investments in facilities are needed to ensure that children's needs can be met, and programs can continue to thrive. Comptroller DiNapoli's report, "Lingering Challenges in the Child Care Sector," released just last week, highlighted the continued need to focus on the availability of child care, particularly in rural areas.

A Child Care Substitute Pool of trusted professionals will ensure that child care programs can remain a pillar of strength and consistency for many children and families. CCRCs know that for providers to keep their programs open they must have adequate staffing. Through a \$3 million investment in a pilot, programs can begin gaining access to already vetted professionals, addressing one factor leading to the ongoing workforce shortage by creating a reliable pipeline of providers.

Additional proposed investments include \$1 million for the Business Navigator program, which operates in each of the ten Regional Economic Development Council regions to help interested businesses identify options to support employees' child care needs. The Business Navigator is a guide designed to help employers understand their employees' child care needs and connect them with relevant tax credits, employee benefits, HR services, and other child care resources. Employer-sponsored child care is an investment in the workforce that yields significant returns.

Over the last six months, the Business Navigator toolkit has been rolled out across New York State. Educational webinars took place from September-November of 2024, and launches in each of the 10 Regional Economic Development Council regions were held between December 2024 and February 2025. Cumulatively, hundreds of businesses across the state have taken part in these Navigator sessions.

When polled, attendees at the Navigator launches indicated that availability and affordability of child care were among the top three challenges impacting their organization's ability to recruit and retain employees. The other two challenges included being able to provide competitive compensation and benefits, and a skills gap in finding qualified candidates.

Attendees indicated that following the Navigator presentations, the action steps they would take to provide child care solutions for their employees included: conducting a survey of employees' child care needs, conducting employee focus groups to assess needs, sharing information with HR and finance departments, establishing Dependent Care Assistance Programs (DCAP), exploring tax incentives, and continuing discussion internally about best next steps and quick wins.

The business community embraces child care because it both creates and supports jobs. The economic impact of child care matters because it helps drive local economies. When parents can access child care, they are more likely to enter the workforce and stay employed. Families depend on functioning child care. This is where CCRCs play a pivotal role. CCRCs work with our partners around the state and OCFS to ensure communities can navigate the child care conundrum.

As members of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care, we support budget and legislative priorities which build from the historic investments of recent years and take New York further down the path to universal child care. The state must invest in the essential child care workforce and continue removing unnecessary access barriers, particularly those impacting children with developmental disabilities and delays.

As the state takes the next steps to build out funding for child care assistance and identify a sustainable path forward for achieving universal child care, we look ahead to changing a system that has been fractured for far too long. In 2022, turnover for child care workers was about 65 percent higher than turnover in average occupations.ⁱ That type of disruption to the lives of children when they need secure attachments to build their social and emotional skills is detrimental. Children are hurt and those that spend their days caring for and educating them are often forced to go work a second job if they want to stay in the field.

The roadmap for universal child care is clear. The framework begins with a permanent investment in the workforce that educates and nurtures our young children. Combining policy and funding solutions will allow for the breakdown of logistical and systemic barriers that are holding the sector and its workforce back. Investments in the workforce are needed now.

ECLC is also a member of the Raising New York coalition that supports programs that lay the groundwork for the best possible outcomes throughout children's lives. To support families in New York State we are also requesting a total investment of \$2 million in the Help Me Grow program to continue access to comprehensive, family-centered, primary prevention services. Help Me Grow is the first line of contact for many families seeking diapers and from that initial contact the program refers families to other services.

In 2023, 22% of parents utilizing referral services from CCRCs were doing so for School Age Child Care. Learning and Enrichment After-school Program Supports (LEAPS) brought significant changes to afterschool funding, addressing long-standing issues but also introducing some challenges that need prompt resolution to ensure a solid foundation for ongoing improvement. For many communities, LEAPS offered a new opportunity to provide high-quality afterschool programming. However, organizations that did not secure a LEAPS award still face unmet afterschool needs, including former Advantage and Empire state grantees who are experiencing significant disruptions. About one-third of eligible applications received LEAPS funding, highlighting a significant gap in support for many afterschool providers. An additional 48,000 children can participate in an afterschool program if New York provides funding to support eligible-but-not-funded LEAPS applicants. Through additional funding quality, enriching programming can be accessible to more students and families.

In order to solve New York's ongoing child care issues, we must follow the path to universal child care for every family in New York State, with a well-compensated child care workforce. So much progress has already been made, and we need to continue to build on that momentum. We can offer child care for all and keep our state thriving. Thank you for the opportunity to provide

our comments to you. Early Care & Learning Council and our CCRC network look forward to continuing to effectively serve the families and communities of New York State.

ⁱ Using Worker Flows to Assess the Stability of the Early Childcare and Education Workforce, 2010-2022 *Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland* <https://www.clevelandfed.org/publications/cd-reports/2024/20240119-childcare-and-education-workforce>