

Written Testimony for the New York State Human Services Budget

Submitted by:

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ECE On The Move (ECEOTM) is a grassroots organization representing more than 700 family child care educators and the families they serve throughout New York City. Our work is grounded in daily, direct engagement with family child care educators in residential settings and 250 parents which they serve, addressing all dimensions of the current child care crisis - including workforce instability, access barriers, waitlists, and system fragmentation - with particular focus on regulatory, policy or budget decisions that shape these realities.

ECEOTM is also a member of, and co-chairs the Steering Committee of, the Empire State Campaign for Child Care (ESCCC), a statewide coalition of parents, educators, and advocates advancing a comprehensive plan to achieve universal child care in New York State — a system in which all families have access to care and all members of the child care workforce earn wages that reflect the true cost and value of their work.

This written testimony reflects what ECEOTM and ESCCC consistently hear from family child care educators and parents across New York State and outlines our shared priorities for the 2026–2027 State Budget.

1. Workforce Stability Must Be the Foundation of the Child Care System

Across our organizations, the most urgent and consistent message from family child care (FCC) educators is that the current system still does not pay educators what it costs to provide care.

Family child care educators operate small businesses out of their homes while delivering essential early childhood education and care. They serve infants, toddlers, preschool, afterschool, children with special needs, and families working nontraditional hours - often in communities where other forms of care are scarce or inaccessible.

Despite their essential role, educators consistently report that reimbursement rates do not cover the full cost of care, including operating expenses, staffing when applicable, and a sustainable income for themselves. As a result, they are routinely forced to make tradeoffs between personal financial stability and keeping their programs open.

ECEOTM, along with ESCCC, supports the Governor's executive proposal to invest in early childhood education and urges that it include the establishment of a supplemental workforce

fund. This is necessary because New York State has not yet achieved a system that pays providers based on the true cost of care.

Until such a system is fully implemented, supplemental workforce support is essential to stabilize the field. From the FCC educator perspective, these funds are not discretionary or temporary enhancements. They are the mechanism that allows educators to:

- Pay themselves consistently
- Cover rising operating and compliance costs
- Retain staff when applicable
- Maintain program quality and continuity for families

Absent this support, ECEOTM and ESCCC continue to see educators quietly reduce capacity or exit the field altogether. Workforce attrition undermines every other child care investment and directly limits access for families.

For these reasons, ECEOTM and ESCCC urge the Legislature to prioritize workforce stability at the top of the child care budget and to ensure that supplemental compensation mechanisms remain in place until a full cost-of-care model is achieved statewide.

2. The Child Care Assistance Waitlist Is Causing Real Harm to Families, FCC and all ECE educators

ECEOTM and ESCCC appreciate the Governor's proposed investments in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and the acknowledgement that waitlists exist across New York State.

However, from the perspective of both families and educators, the waitlist represents a structural failure of the system rather than a temporary inconvenience.

Parents regularly report that they are eligible for assistance but unable to access it due to enrollment closures or prolonged waitlists with no clear timelines. These barriers force families to make destabilizing decisions that ripple across households, providers, and communities.

One example we hear repeatedly is when a family already has a child with a child care assistance voucher in a family child care program, but a new baby is placed on the waitlist. Parents come to their trusted educator and say, "I'm on the waiting list. I don't know how long I'll be on it - or if I'll ever come off - but I need care so I can keep working." In these moments, family child care educators often make the decision to care for the baby without pay, because they are committed to keeping the family together and keeping parents working. This effectively asks a workforce already underpaid to provide care for free in order to hold the system together.

Another common scenario involves families and educators negotiating payment based solely on what a family can afford - often an amount that is close to nothing. Families who need child care

assistance typically do not have sufficient income to pay privately for care. As a result, educators accept deeply reduced compensation to meet community needs. If child care is to be treated as a public good, this practice is fundamentally unsustainable. We would never ask families to pay for public school based on what they can afford. Yet this is precisely what the current system demands of child care educators, which is why the market rate model continues to fail both families and educators.

A third example involves families with multiple children navigating fragmented systems. Many families have one child currently receiving child care assistance, another enrolled in a Pre-K program, and a new baby on the way. That baby is immediately placed on the CCAP waitlist. The result is a single family managing three children across three different systems, often in three different locations, with no coordination or continuity of care. Family choice is neither prioritized nor resourced. This same fragmentation occurs for families with two children - one in Pre-K and another in a center-based or family child care program - creating instability for parents, children, and FCC educators alike.

ECEOTM and ESCCC urge the Legislature to ensure that the final State Budget includes sufficient funding to meaningfully begin paring down the child care assistance waitlist and to establish a clear, actionable plan for its eradication.

A system in which families qualify but cannot enroll is not functioning. Permanent waitlists are incompatible with the goal of universal child care.

3. Community-Based Universal Child Care Models Are a Necessary Bridge

ECEOTM and ESCCC strongly support the Governor's proposal to invest in community-based universal child care models as a bridge toward statewide universal child care.

Our work on the ground makes clear that families most likely to fall through waitlists and eligibility gaps are often concentrated in specific communities. These are the same communities where child care access is most fragile and where family child care providers are the primary source of care.

Community-based universal models offer a pathway to:

- Reach families currently excluded from assistance
- Remove administrative and eligibility barriers
- Demonstrate the full economic and social benefits of universal access

For these models to succeed, they must be truly universal, free from income, work, immigration status, and reporting requirements, and inclusive of all modalities of care, including family child care homes.

ECEOTM and ESCCC urge that these initiatives be treated not as one-time pilots, but as a meaningful bridge toward a statewide system that guarantees access for all families.

4. Conclusion

ECEOTM submits this written testimony, alongside ESCCC, to underscore that the child care crisis is experienced daily by educators and families navigating a system that remains under-resourced and fragmented.

The 2026–2027 New York State Budget presents an opportunity to:

- Stabilize the child care workforce
- Meaningfully reduce and eliminate the child care assistance waitlist
- Invest in community-based universal models
- Build a coordinated early childhood system that supports all modalities of care

ECEOTM and ESCCC urge the Legislature to build on the Governor's executive proposal with sustained and adequate investment and a clear commitment to universal child care in New York State.