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## Testimony of the Alliance of NYS YMCAs

Presented to the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Committee on Human Services

February 5, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the FY 26-27 Executive Budget proposal.

On behalf of the 35 YMCA Associations and 140 branches across the state, the Alliance of New York State YMCAs advocates for policies that help youth develop into healthy leaders, prevent and combat chronic disease, and foster strong, connected communities.

The YMCA has a long history of meeting the needs of New Yorkers through a range of programs and services, including: universal pre-kindergarten and early child care, before/after school programs, summer and expanded learning opportunities, swim instruction and water safety, youth sports, housing supports, and evidence-based health and wellness interventions. Collectively, YMCAs serve as one of the State's most trusted community-based providers across the lifespan.

Our testimony today highlights the **critical role of coordinated and sustained state investments across the early care and education, school-age, and family support systems**. Together, these investments are essential to supporting children, working families, and communities to promote long-term stability and wellbeing statewide.

### **Before/After school and Expanded Learning Opportunities**

Before/after school programs provide safe, enriching environments where children and youth develop academically, socially, and emotionally. For working families, after school programs are essential.

We are grateful for the **Governor's proposed increased investment of \$6M in LEAPS** (Learning and Enrichment After-School Program Supports), which allows for minimum wage increases for the staff in these programs. However, the demand for after school in New York State persists - with over



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**1.3 million children** whose parents want to enroll them in a program but cannot. While the State has made encouraging investments and taken notable steps to streamline the system, including the consolidation of Advantage and Empire, approximately **48,000 children lost programming during the transition to LEAPS**, further exacerbating the need. This [map](#) shows lost slots by county.

In alignment with the New York State Network for Youth Success (the statewide afterschool network) and afterschool partners, we urge the following afterschool investments in the budget:

1. Allocate an additional **\$180M** to enhance and expand the LEAPS grant.
  - Invest **\$155M** to fund high-quality LEAPS applicants deemed “eligible but not funded,” restoring access for approximately 48,000 children.
  - **Invest \$25M** to restore access to afterschool for middle and high school students excluded from LEAPS.

As the largest provider of school-age child care in New York State, YMCAs see firsthand the need for high-quality afterschool programming. Investing in afterschool programs, particularly for middle and high school students, is not just about filling a gap – it’s about providing a structured environment, academic support, and mentorship during a critical development period. Adolescents face increasing academic pressures, social challenges, and, most alarmingly, a growing youth mental health crisis. Afterschool programs are a protective factor, and keep young people engaged in positive activities, providing access to caring mentors, and fostering social emotional development.

The Alliance applauds Governor Hochul for her investments to expand access to child care and Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK). However, we urge policymakers to recognize that **afterschool programs are essential to the success of universal early care and learning.**

Parents with multiple children have shared they have even declined free/reduced-price child care services because they could not secure



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affordable afterschool care for older siblings, opting to leave the workforce altogether to care for all children.

Affordability also remains a major consideration. While the Governor's proposals are a first step to put the state on a path to universal child care, a "cost cliff" will be created when moving from free or low-cost child care/UPK programs to paying much higher rates (or even full price) for afterschool. On average, \$17,000 is the estimated cost of afterschool care once children reach school age. According to 2025 Afterschool Alliance data, 58% of New York parents reported afterschool programs are too expensive, preventing them from enrolling their child(ren).<sup>1</sup>

National data also reports **over 1 million New York children who want an afterschool program cannot access one**, and **cost remains one of the biggest barriers for families**.<sup>2</sup> In parallel to this challenge, providers continue to face rising staffing, facility, and operational costs that are not adequately addressed through current afterschool funding levels.

Without simultaneous investment alongside the Governor's proposals across the child care system, we will destabilize providers and undermine that system from the start.

As negotiations continue, we urge consideration for aligning afterschool investments with the Governor's proposal of universal child care pilots. We ask state leaders to add universal afterschool to the county pilots for universal child care—Broome, Dutchess, and Monroe—which have lost 369, 1,440, and 1,166 afterschool slots, respectively, since the creation of LEAPS. Expansions of both child care and Pre-K will be maximized and most successful with parallel investments in afterschool and expanded learning opportunities. We would also note that LEAPS funding can be used for Pre-K—another way to connect these programs and shore up the delivery of prekindergarten. **At a per pupil rate of \$3,400, restoring LEAPS slots in the three pilot counties will cost an estimated \$10.2M.** We look

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<sup>1</sup> [America After 3PM 2025](#)

<sup>2</sup> [America After 3PM 2025](#)



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forward to working with policymakers to determine how the State could provide truly universal afterschool in these three counties.

### **Early Child Care and Universal Pre-K**

The Alliance applauds the Governor's vision for universal child care and urges the Legislature to adopt the proposed collective \$1.7B investment in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Pre-K and universal child care pilot projects. A robustly funded, recurring CCAP system will allow most of the more than 30 counties that have closed enrollment to CCAP to reopen so more families can access care and so providers will be supported with stable funding. While these investments lay the groundwork to achieving statewide universal child care, we urge the following considerations throughout budget negotiations:

- Build upon the Governor's strong child care proposals by providing **ongoing and reliable compensation supplements to all members of the child care workforce**. A thoughtful statewide universal child care system will not be achieved without paying providers a thriving wage. (\$1.2B)
- Adopt the Governor's proposal to invest \$60M to support Community Care models in three communities, and add more funds if necessary to ensure they are truly universal and not treated as one-time pilots, but rather a bridge to statewide universal child care.
- Adopt the Governor's proposal to invest approximately \$500M to achieve universal statewide Pre-K for 4-year olds by the 2028-29 school year, to create a uniform grant funded at the greater of either \$10,000 or the district's current Foundation Aid per pupil. **Scale investments in community-based providers accordingly**, such as through sustainable contract structures, an increased CBO set aside, and protections that



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recognize operational realities. This will ensure the vision is implemented in a way that supports the equitable access to programs and the existing mixed delivery infrastructure.

YMCAs operate approximately 400 OCFS licensed child care programs, with a licensed capacity of over 35,000 across the State. YMCAs also serve approximately 5,400 children through statewide Pre-K programs. Embedded in communities, YMCAs see firsthand the need families have for high-quality and consistent care. We urge adoption of proposed investments, and consideration for the additional investments highlighted above to strengthen New York's early childhood infrastructure with a continuum of care that serves families across the State.

### **Supports for Families and Communities**

#### **Protect and Strengthen SNAP, WIC, and Other Food Security Programs**

Amid rising food insecurity and unprecedented cuts to federal nutrition programs, this year's budget must protect New Yorkers' access to SNAP, WIC, and other critical anti-hunger programs. We support Executive Budget proposals to transition to EBT chip cards, increase funding for emergency food programs, and expand access to summer nutrition programs—but more is needed to respond to the food security crisis at hand. The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), New York's network of SNAP navigators, will play a critical role in helping New Yorkers access and maintain SNAP benefits amid federal policy changes, but without additional state investment to backfill federal cuts, many communities will lose SNAP navigators when they are needed most. We urge the Legislature to fund NOEP at **\$8.5M to sustain access to SNAP navigators statewide**. We also ask the Legislature to provide **\$30M in supplemental WIC funding** to ensure local agencies can serve all eligible families seeking services and reach more of the approximately 200,000 eligible but unenrolled New Yorkers. New York can also build on successful programs, including by increasing the minimum SNAP benefit, extending food benefits to families who are excluded from SNAP solely due to immigration status, and expanding Nourish New York, HPNAP, and Double Up Food Bucks. Together,



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these investments will support food security, health, and affordability for New Yorkers.

The YMCA is more than a gym or a place to swim – it's a powerful part of New York's communities. Even before the federal government shut down and lapsed SNAP benefits, families relied on community organizations like the YMCA in the face of rising food costs and affordability concerns. Over the past few months, YMCAs across the state have reported:

- More children arriving at before/after school programs without snacks.
- Increased reliance on YMCA programs that provide meals and snacks.
- Increased confusion and worry from families and inquiries about how to access food and other resources in the community.

At the community-level, YMCAs remain committed to mobilizing to meet needs, whether through delivering meals to homebound seniors, expanding food pantries in branches and in partnership with local providers, and increasing the number of meals/snacks served to youth. We urge the above investments to not only prevent hunger, but to strengthen communities via one of the most fundamental supports needed to thrive.

The Alliance is deeply grateful to the Legislature for the \$1 million line-item investment that the New York State YMCA Foundation received in the FY 25-26 budget. This operational support funding strengthened YMCA stability by covering essential utilities, supporting key equipment and program needs, and helping YMCAs to maintain safe, welcoming facilities through critical HVAC repairs and upgrades. **We respectfully request a \$4 million increase, for a total of \$5 million, to ensure Ys can continue to support communities across NYS.**

In 2025, New York State YMCAs:

- Served 773,362 people in health and wellness programs
- Delivered nearly 120,000 swim lessons to young people
- Provided over 1.4 million meals to food-insecure New Yorkers
- Housed more than 13,000 individuals in supportive housing units across the state.



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As we navigate challenges presented by unpredictable federal funding, investments in community partners like the YMCA bolster the safety net and fill critical gaps [to directly meet needs](#) in communities across the State.

## **Conclusion**

As budget negotiations continue, we urge the Legislature and the Executive to view early care and education, school-age child care, food security, and community-based supports as interconnected investments in New York's people and economy.

The Governor's proposals represent an important opportunity to inject much-needed resources and expand access to programs. Success will depend on ensuring these investments are made thoughtfully to strengthen – rather than destabilize – the current infrastructure.

New York has the opportunity to lead with thoughtful, coordinated, and sustainable investments that support providers, protect families, and meet communities where they are. On behalf of YMCAs across the state, the Alliance of New York State YMCAs stands ready to partner to ensure children, families, and communities are supported across the State.

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