



**Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees
on the SFY 2026-27 Executive Budget
Human Services Budget Hearing
February 5, 2026**

The **Empire State Campaign for Child Care** is a statewide coalition of parents, educators, and advocates who believe that every family in New York State deserves high quality, universal child care and that every child care educator deserves to earn a thriving wage. The campaign was founded in 2017, and advocates at the state and federal level for investment in child care that best serves the needs of New York's families and child care educators.

Top Human Services Budget Recommendations for 2026

The Empire State Campaign for Child Care's top priority for New York children and families is to achieve a high-quality, coordinated, early education and afterschool system that is universally available to all families with children birth through 13, and free to all.

We are thrilled the Executive Budget proposes significant new investments in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), pre-K and 3-K, and to launch universal child care pilots, including community care models for children ages zero to three in three communities outside of New York City. These proposals align to a large degree with the Empire State Campaign for Child Care's vision for universal child care in New York State – one which includes children birth through 13; puts low-income families first; prioritizes fairly compensating the workforce; maximizes federal child care assistance funds during the rollout; and stages the rollout to avoid unintended consequences like increased tuition for middle-income families, or a loss of already scarce infant and toddler capacity.

Looking ahead, we urge state leaders to ensure these expansions are carefully implemented to avoid unintentionally destabilizing child care programs, causing a greater shortage of infant and toddler seats – which are already in short supply. We cannot meet the affordability challenges facing New York families, nor achieve the state's goal of universal child care and pre-K, unless we act with intention to ensure we don't expand care for one age group of children at the expense of other age groups.

Empire State Campaign for Child Care Recommendations for the final enacted budget:

Overall, we urge the Legislature to adopt the Executive Budget's \$1.7 billion proposal to significantly expand pre-K and 3-K, fund the child care assistance program and community care models for children ages zero to three in three communities outside of New York City. If

these proposals are included in the final budget, along with additional funding to ensure adequate and equitable compensation for the early childhood and afterschool workforce, and are carefully implemented, they will be game-changing for New York families, and will move New York State decisively closer to achieving statewide universal pre-K, child care, and afterschool.

We look to the Legislature to build upon the Executive Budget proposals and ensure there is investment in child care workforce. We recommend that the final budget:

- Provides ongoing and reliable compensation supplements to all members of the child care workforce until New York has achieved statewide universal child care that pays providers adequate rates to pay the workforce a thriving wage (\$1.2 billion). New York cannot achieve universal child care without recruiting and retaining far more professionals in the field, which is not possible without a significant and sustained compensation increase.

In addition:

- Adopt the Governor's proposed \$1.2 billion recurring investment in New York's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and add additional funding as needed to ensure no eligible families are turned away or placed on waitlists. As of January 2026, 33 counties and NYC have closed enrollment or started waitlists because demand is outpacing investment in the program, leaving thousands of eligible families across the state scrambling to patch together care for their children, with some having to reduce their work hours or leave the workforce altogether.
 - CCAP funding is typically not available to counties until October following the passage of the state budget (following the federal fiscal year). Recognizing the urgent need to reopen CCAP enrollment in these counties as soon as possible, the Executive Budget makes some of the proposed CCAP funds available to counties immediately upon passage of the budget (\$155 million to counties outside of NYC; \$475 million for NYC). Unfortunately, the budget includes requirements that may make it difficult for counties outside of NYC to access those funds – including that they can only use those funds for claims ending before September 30, 2026 – a quick turnaround given the budget will be finalized April 1 at the earliest. Notably, the 2025-26 enacted budget made \$50 million immediately available to counties outside of New York City upon passage of the budget on the same terms and the restrictions prevented most counties from accessing the funds.
 - We urge the Legislature to work with the Executive to secure language changes to ensure there are no barriers to counties accessing CCAP funds as soon as the budget is finalized. It is likely that the best way to address this is for the state to allow counties to claim their portion of the \$155 million in either the current or upcoming federal fiscal year (ending on September 30, 2027) to better reflect counties' spending obligations. **New York families are depending on counties to reopen CCAP enrollment across NYS as soon as possible.**

- Adopt the Governor’s proposal to invest \$66 million to support Community Care models in three communities, and add more funds if necessary to ensure they are truly universal, and are treated not as one-time pilots, but as a bridge to statewide universal child care. It is essential that all modalities of child care—including center and home-based child care providers—can fully participate in Community Care models.

For more information on this topic, please read our following report:

The Empire State Campaign for Child Care’s [*New York State Child Care for All: The Plan to Achieve It*](#).