

Testimony to the Joint Budget Hearing on Labor/Workforce Development

CHILD CARE WORKFORCE COLLABORATIVE FEB. 25, 2026

Thank you for allowing us to submit testimony on behalf of the Child Care Workforce Collaborative. Housed at CUNY's **Early Childhood Professional Development Institute**, this privately funded group was formed in 2023 and includes several **Child Care Availability Task Force** and/or **Empire State Campaign for Child Care** members from the following organizations: the **New York Association for the Education of Young Children**, the **Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy**, the **Early Care & Learning Council**, the **Day Care Council of New York**, and **Jenn O'Connor Consulting, LLC**. The **Center for New York City Affairs at The New School** is also a member.

The Collaborative was charged with developing **recommendations** to not only stabilize, but transform, the child care workforce. These recommendations are supportive of both an immediate wage increase and a longer term investment in sustainability — namely a true cost of care model, a career ladder, and a complimentary compensation scale. Extensive work has already been done by our Collaborative team to develop these models and plans for implementation.¹

The State's proposed expansion of universal prekindergarten for both three- and four-year-olds, as well as an investment in 2Care in New York City, is

welcome. However, we worry that it will negatively impact the child care workforce if that workforce is not prioritized. We urge you to support the growth of organizations and systems that have created pathways that respect existing experience and education, make it easier to access continuing education and professional development, and compensate this workforce appropriately.

A few points:

- A decade ago, expanded investment towards universal pre-K provided families with free, high-quality early education for four-year-olds. Unfortunately, an unintended consequence was that parents removed their children from child care programs. This, coupled with the lower wages paid to child care providers and educators compared to pre-K teachers, led to an exodus from the child care field, destabilizing the sector. We cannot let something similar happen again.
- Eighty-five percent of all brain development occurs before age three, and 90% before age five. High-quality child care is not babysitting — it is essential early education. We support a mixed-delivery system that allows and, in fact, encourages school districts to contract with community-based child care programs to provide pre-K, 3K, and 2Care.

¹ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/69558138575781688a76dbf7/1767211320269/Dignified+Pay+for+Quality+Care--+What+New+York%E2%80%99s+Family+Child+Care+Providers+Need+to+Thrive.pdf>

We further implore the State to support the child care providers **and** educators who work with infants and toddlers — especially those programs operating in home-based settings.

- New York State **subsidizes a number of industries** — from technology companies to sports stadiums. **Economists noted** more than 20 years ago that subsidizing early childhood development has a greater—and longer term—return on investment. Early childhood education programs employ people for extended periods of time (as opposed to construction jobs) and, in turn, those workers spend money locally, so revenue stays within communities.
- Ninety-three percent of the child care workforce is women, who are predominantly Black and Brown. Twenty-five percent are paid poverty-level wages. More than half have incomes low enough to qualify for child care assistance. We need to break this cycle in 2026.
- According to the **Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at UC Berkeley**, child care and early childhood educators in New York State earn a median hourly wage of approximately \$16, well below what is required for economic stability in most regions of the State. The New York Early Childhood Workforce Index profile finds that early educators' wages are lower than those of 97% of occupations statewide, even as job responsibilities continue to grow and professional requirements increase.

- The consequences of low pay are untenable. Nearly one in five early childhood educators in New York lives below the federal poverty line, a rate several times higher than that of K–12 teachers. More than half of New York's early educators rely on public assistance programs — including SNAP, Medicaid, or child care subsidies — to meet basic needs, meaning that the State is indirectly subsidizing poverty-level wages rather than investing directly in compensation.
- Finally, this workforce keeps New Yorkers employed — including all the new PreK and special education teachers it will be necessary to hire when implementing universal access.

Again, we sincerely appreciate the State's attention to early care and learning. We simply hope our words serve not only as a reminder that this expansion will be built on the backs of an already over-stressed workforce, but that New York does in fact have the infrastructure, expertise, and organizations ready to meet the challenge.

Thank you for your consideration and for reviewing the accompanying documents. We are happy to provide further detail and look forward to working with you.

Child Care Workforce Collaborative



ABOUT THE COLLABORATIVE

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The Collaborative is charged with creating a set of recommendations for increasing compensation for positions in various child care settings. Over the past 18 months, the group has built on the work of the Child Care Availability Task Force and researched different pathways to child care careers, surveyed providers about challenges within their field, and spoken to other states that have increased compensation.

