



**Testimony to the Joint Budget Committee
on behalf of the Orthodox Union**

**Jake Adler, New York Policy Director
OU Advocacy-Teach NYS
February 3, 2015**

Good afternoon, Chair Farrell, Chair DeFrancisco, Chair Flanagan, Chair Nolan, and members of the Budget Committee. Thank you for holding this important hearing and for allowing me to testify. My name is Jake Adler and I am the New York Policy Director for OU Advocacy-Teach NYS, the public policy arm of the Orthodox Union. The Orthodox Union is the nation's largest Orthodox Jewish umbrella organization and we are here today representing the Jewish day school community and the students they serve.

As the sages said, "The time is short and the work is abundant." Since this hearing has been going on for some time, I will keep my comments brief.

The Orthodox Union remains appreciative for the aid the legislature has repeatedly provided to non-public schools. Unfortunately, despite funding increases to programs for non-public education, our community's parents are still struggling.

The following three issues are of critical import to our families.

The Education Investment Tax Credit or EITC

The Orthodox Union's top priority this year is passing the Education Investment Tax Credit bill, which could provide an unprecedented amount of funding for New York's non-public schools. The EITC can also help the state's neediest parents, while allowing them the freedom to continue to educate their children as they see fit. Since the EITC would provide tax credits for corporate donations made to educational organizations that benefit public schools as well as private schools, the bill has the potential to benefit the broadest swath of New York's schoolchildren.

Although the budget for the EITC is a fraction of the overall education budget for the state, should the bill pass, it has the potential to send more funding to the state's neediest public schools through private donations than ever before, while at the same time benefiting non-public school parents.

Repayment of CAP Arrears

Another critical issue for the Orthodox Union is the repayment of the nearly \$500 million debt from historic underfunding of the Comprehensive Attendance Policy for private schools or CAP. The CAP program was mandated by this legislature and yet underfunded nearly from the moment it was created. The CAP mandate requires certain regulatory compliance for non-public schools and yet these very schools are owed hundreds of millions of dollars by the state. In 2014,



\$16 million dollars was allocated to pay down this debt. We ask that you continue to pay down the remaining \$300 million that the state is in arrears in a responsible manner and set a clear date for the total repayment of this debt.

Universal Pre-Kindergarten

Finally, I would like to bring the Orthodox Union's concerns about the Universal Pre-Kindergarten, or UPK, program to your attention. This time last year, the State Legislature allocated \$340 million dollars statewide for the UPK program as a way to ensure that every community in the state that wanted to could provide pre-K education to its four-year-olds. New York City received the vast majority—or \$300 million—of that funding so that Mayor de Blasio could create a “truly universal” full-day pre-K program. Per the Mayor's inaugural State of the City address, his signature UPK program would provide pre-K to every child from every borough in New York City, regardless of religious affiliation or socio-economic status. However, because Mayor de Blasio tacked on an additional hour and 20 minutes to the state's regulations of five hours of uninterrupted secular education—or a 6-hour and 20-minute day—it is nearly impossible for the City's Jewish day schools to participate in the program while still maintaining appropriate levels of privately-funded religious instruction. In other words, Mayor de Blasio's extended day leaves 89 percent of the four-year-old population in the Jewish community out of the City's Universal Pre-K program. As the largest provider of non-public education in New York City, according to New York City's Independent Budget Office, Jewish day schools should be a partner in Mayor de Blasio's vision to reach his goal of complete enrollment. Unfortunately, 11 percent enrollment is far from universal.

The extra regulations the Mayor implemented created a \$300 million dollar program that leaves the majority of New York City's Jewish day school students out in the cold. We ask that you insist upon practical changes to this program to accommodate all communities, before you renew this funding. Additionally, we ask that you work to address the dearth of UPK programs outside of New York City. Both the public and non-public school communities outside of the city need additional funding to give every child the solid educational foundation he/she deserves.

Thank you for your work on behalf of the people in the great state of New York.