



Citizens' Committee for Children *of* NEW YORK

Testimony Provided to the New York State Senate Committee on Children and Families Hearing: The Child Care Crisis in New York State

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Thank you to Chair Brisport and members of the Senate Committee on Children and Families for holding this critical meeting on New York State's current child care crisis. Citizens' Committee for Children of New York is a 76-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, nor represent a sector or workforce. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

As we emerge from the pandemic, it is particularly critical to invest in accessible child care in order to combat the countless adverse effects of COVID-19 on New York's youngest children. Child care plays a key role in the early stages of development for young children, offering opportunities for social, academic, and psychological growth. Furthermore, a lack of child care disproportionately impacts working families and women of color who are the backbone of the child care workforce. In 2021, only seven percent of families in New York City with children under five reported being able to afford center-based child care, and women were two and half times more likely than men to cite a lack of child care as their primary reason for being out of work.¹ Additionally, according to CCC's latest Child and Family Well-being Index, in 29 counties across the state, less than 50 percent of 3 and 4-year-olds are enrolled in care.²

We believe that child care should be affordable and accessible statewide for all children. We also believe that the State will not be able to achieve universal access to affordable child care without better supporting child care providers.

We commend Governor Hochul for her proposals within the State of the State that would help propel New York State toward accessible child care for all, including:

- Capping copays at 1 percent for families

¹ Halkitis, S., Drobjnak, M., Hornick-Becker, D., Kimiager, B. (December 2020). "NYC's Child Care Affordability Crisis Displaces Women and Households with Low Incomes from the Labor Force." CCC. Retrieved from: <https://cccnewyork.org/data-publications/nycs-child-care-affordability-crisis-displaces-women-and-households-with-low-incomes-from-the-labor-force/>

² January, 2023. CCC *Child and Family Well-being in New York State*. CCC. Retrieved from: <https://cccnewyork.org/data-publications/cfwbny2023/?section=Statewide+Findings>

- Increasing child care subsidy eligibility by raising the income limit to 85% of the state median income
- Automatic income eligibility for families enrolled in other forms of public assistance
- Creating a streamlined and centralized subsidy application process
- Workforce compensation investments through a Workforce Retention Grant Program which would utilize unspent federal funds
- Investing \$125 million to further expand pre-K
- Calling on the State and Child Care Availability Task Force (CCATF) to continue evaluating alternative workforce compensation models, which will ideally lead to a new provider reimbursement methodology.

CCC supports these proposals and urges state leaders to ensure they are included in the FY'24 Enacted Budget. However, the state can go even further to transform New York's child care system to work for all providers and families. **CCC, in partnership with the Empire State Campaign for Children (ESCCC), is calling on the state to support these essential child care investments and policy changes:**

- **Extend child care assistance program eligibility to undocumented families statewide.** Even as the state focuses on subsidy eligibility expansion, because of the bureaucratic obstacles within the current subsidy system, undocumented families will still be excluded from receiving support. CCC believes that child care should be accessible to all families, regardless of immigration status.
- **Eliminate benefit cliffs by allowing families whose income exceeds the current eligibility threshold to maintain and recertify their eligibility for assistance (up to 400% of Federal Poverty Level).** While the Governor has proposed to increase income eligibility to 85% of State Median Income from the current 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), her proposal does not address the existence of a sharp benefits cliff.
- **Provide a monthly per-child supplement to providers offering non-traditional hour care and fund a start-up grant program for providers seeking to offer non-traditional hour care.** Finding and accessing non-traditional hour care (overnight care, extended day care, etc.) is extremely difficult for families across the state. This proposal would incentivize providers to offer that care and hopefully create more options for families statewide.
- **Through legislation, enact presumptive eligibility for care.** Currently, administrative processing times can leave families waiting for months to be approved for subsidies. This would ensure that families do not need to wait for paperwork to be fully processed before beginning to receive assistance.
- **Allow counties to decouple work hours from child care subsidy eligibility** so that caregivers with fluctuating work schedules, caregivers a part of the gig economy, and caregivers with other needs outside of work hours are eligible for full-time subsidized child care if that is their preference.

New York is facing a child care crisis from the perspectives of both providers and families. We are grateful for the attention state leaders are paying to these urgent issues, and we stand ready to work with the Governor, OCFS, and the state legislature to advance policy and budgetary proposals that can strengthen this system and contribute to an equitable recovery for all New Yorkers. Thank you for continuously prioritizing New York's children and families.