



For Immediate Release:
January 13, 2010

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Media Release

Parents, Union, Child Care Providers and Advocates Call for State to Take Action to Make Child Care Program Fair

ALBANY – A report released by Empire Justice Center today, *Mending the Patchwork*, documents a persistent lack of fairness in the way child care assistance is administered in New York State. The report, which includes a summary of policy variations in each county and an economic analysis by the Fiscal Policy Institute, found that the current practice of allowing the local Social Services Districts to determine parental co-payments and other eligibility criteria has **no rational basis and must be changed to ensure that both low income working parents and child care businesses across the state are treated equally in this federally funded program.**

“Through my work in this field I continually see hard working parents and providers undermined by our state’s practice of allowing counties to make these critical decisions about child care program benefits which should be uniform across the state,” said Susan Antos, Senior Staff Attorney in the Albany office of Empire Justice Center and co-author of the report. “**Many parents pay up to four times more for child care than parents with identical incomes in neighboring counties, simply because of the different co-pay multipliers chosen by their counties.** Other parents lose their child care slots when they are laid off because 30% of the districts won’t pay for care while they look for another a job. Providers in some counties, but not others, lose money when children are absent or when caring for children whose parents work evenings and weekends because of differing county policies on payment. **This is not the way a state such as New York should allow its child care program to function.**”

“Our analysis concluded that across the state **there is no relationship between personal income and costs for housing or child care and the co-payments** that social services districts

charge working poor families for child care. Therefore, districts' discretion in providing child care subsidies does not ensure equal access to child care funds, and the current formula and guidelines provided by the state to set these family shares should be changed," said Carolyn Boldiston, Senior Fiscal Policy Analyst with the Fiscal Policy Institute.

"One of my legislative priorities is to ensure greater access to quality child care and to make it affordable to everyone who needs it. Quality child care means the world to working parents and to the children who learn and grow in these programs," said Senator Velmanette Montgomery, (D) Brooklyn, who chairs the New York State Senate Committee on Children and Families. "I applaud Empire Justice Center's recommendations to expand quality child care and look forward to helping make their ideas a reality."

Susan Wawrzyniak, **a grandparent caring for her young grandson**, shared her own story as an example of how the practice of allowing counties to arbitrarily set policies hurts parents and caregivers. Her county does not pay for child care for caregivers who work nights and need time to sleep. She works the night shift at her job and although she was financially eligible, she was denied child care for those sleeping hours. **"A child care subsidy would have given me the critical support I needed to care for my beautiful grandson, and would have taken away much of the stress in an already very stressful endeavor,"** said Ms. Wawrzyniak.

Danny Donohue, Statewide President of CSEA said, "Many of our members provide child care services to children receiving DSS subsidies who live in different counties. Family child care providers often care for children over 60 hours per week, including evening and weekends, to accommodate the needs of working families in their communities. **Understanding and complying with two, three or four sets of county rules is burdensome, inefficient, and doesn't support our members in the valuable work they do providing child care for working families and nurturing the healthy development of New York's young children."**

"Some counties don't pay providers for the days when children are absent due to illness. **When kids are sick and miss a day or two, our programs are still open and our operating costs are the same. Paying for child absent days is a reimbursement rule that should be consistent across counties** because it helps ensure that we can meet our operating expenses and that kids have access to quality early learning and care programs that ready them for kindergarten," noted Wendy Nashid-Jackson, VOICE/CSEA Member, Westchester County.

Providers that invest in improving the quality of their care and provide enhanced or flexible services for parents are rarely able to obtain higher compensation from the counties for their efforts. The report found that **only ten districts pay providers an enhanced rate if they have national accreditation** and only twelve districts pay a higher rate for care provided during non-traditional hours.

"Given the state's investment in creating QUALITYstarsNY, which helps parents choose the best possible care for their children through a quality rating and improvement system, the state

should also, as an incentive, **ensure that those providers that receive a high rating are eligible to receive a pay differential, on a statewide basis, not based on where their business is located,**" said Carol Saginaw, Executive Director of the Early Care & Learning Council.

To address inequities like those described above, the report calls on the legislature to introduce legislation that would establish a temporary work group to **develop a sliding fee scale for childcare copayments, based on the family's ability to pay. Any geographic variations would be tied to specific economic factors such as cost of living.** The legislation would require that all districts pay for care while a financially eligible parent or relative care giver who works the night shift - like Ms. Wawrzyniak - sleeps. It would also adopt statewide policies regarding absences and higher payments for accredited care. Finally, the report recommends that **until the legislation developed by the work group is enacted, the state uniformly caps parental co-payments at 10% to 12% of household income to provide immediate equity to parents across the state.**

"The time has come for the state to take control of the administration of the child care subsidy program, put an end to arbitrary policymaking and to support our low income working parents, like Ms. Wawrzyniak and professional caregivers like Ms. Nashid-Jackson," said Saima Akhtar, Staff Attorney in the Albany office of Empire Justice Center and co-author of the report. **We look forward to working with Senator Montgomery, her Senate colleagues, the Assembly and the Governor to make this happen for the children of New York."**