



Early Care & Learning Council

United to Promote Quality

Joint Legislative Public Hearing: 2024-2025 Executive Budget Proposal Human Services

Submitted by
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and input on the proposed budget for New York State. Early Care & Learning Council (ECLC) and our network of 35 Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies provide direct assistance and support to parents, child care providers, and employers in all 62 counties. We are thankful to the Hochul Administration and the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) for their continuous support of our programs and recognition of the key role CCR&Rs play in the child care ecosystem.

Affordable, quality child care is essential for parents to be able to work and contribute to the economy. Yet, finding care is not an easy feat. For thousands of families, providers and employers throughout the state, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies are a key support in navigating the complex child care system. CCR&Rs assist parents in their search for access to quality, equitable care; help to open new child care programs; provide technical assistance to providers; and meet the mental healthcare needs of infants and toddlers in child care settings. In short, CCR&Rs are the workforce behind the workforce.

Child care both creates and supports jobs. The economic impact of child care matters because it helps drive local economies. When parents can access child care, they are more likely to enter the workforce and stay employed. Families depend on functioning child care. This is where CCR&Rs play a pivotal role. CCR&Rs work with our partners around the state and OCFS to ensure communities can navigate the child care conundrum.

The CCR&R Network has established connections to the local child care providers within their communities, coupled with a strong understanding of regional needs, challenges and opportunities facing families. Most significantly, CCR&R staff provides the early childhood expertise and knowledge of best practices required to ensure the support of high-quality early care and education. Access to a more enriching early education for all young children is what drives the work of ECLC and the CCR&Rs. We believe this is best achieved by creating a more equitable child care system--one dedicated to creating a positive and lasting impact on the lives of young children and their families. We believe this can be achieved by continuing to cultivate environments that foster Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB).

Request: Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Officers - \$1.5 Million Annually

Funding is needed to address and mitigate racism and unconscious bias in the early care and learning system. To help reduce the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of young children of color, we see a need for greater regional support for this initiative. We are seeking

support for the hiring of one Equity Officer within each of the seven OCFS regions—to guide and facilitate the equity work of the CCR&Rs across New York State. This action will provide people with the power necessary to cultivate environments where culturally responsive early care and education is available to all children and families. The Equity Officers across all regions will collaboratively be responsible for the development and implementation of anti-racist curriculum, as well as partnership with the Division of Child Care Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility (DEIA) committees to eradicate systemic and institutionalized forms of discrimination.

ECLC's DEIB programming and established CCR&R relationships in the community will also be central to these roles. Our programming includes the Leading with Racial Equity Initiative (LWRE), Multicultural Workgroup, It Takes a Village (Expulsion/Suspension Policy) Summits and the CCR&R Leadership Initiative.

LWRE is an accountability cohort for early childhood professionals working across systems to develop a shared understanding of race equity and to create measurable actions toward realizing equity within their own institutions.

The Multicultural Workgroup is a CCR&R-focused group that combines experiential and didactic training with reflective conversation as a resource to staff serving child care providers & families, focused at increasing staff cultural intelligence, reducing bias, and improving interpersonal communication. This type of training is crucial to ensuring that child care providers in a community can always see themselves in the guidance that they receive from their local CCR&R.

"It Takes a Village" Expulsion/Suspension Summit convenes experts across a variety of sectors from all regions of New York State to address the problem of suspension and expulsion of Black and Brown boys, featuring the voices of other nationally recognized leaders in the Early Care and Education field. The Summit also serves to highlight and uplift the voices of parents and providers affected by suspension/expulsion policy and its implications on the practical level across agencies, communities, and families.

The CCR&R Leadership Initiative is a program for leaders in the NYS Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Network to grow their race equity lens in concrete and measurable ways, supporting culturally responsive and trauma-informed practice at the institutional level by targeting decision makers in the field.

With funding for Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging officer positions, elements of this successful programming can be replicated around the state as the CCR&R network intentionally

works with Regional Offices of the Office of Child and Family Services. We will continue to expand upon partnerships that allow each community to adopt the strategies that work for their population. By embracing diversity, children and families of various backgrounds will be met with the same respect and care; and by pursuing equity, we will ensure that all children have the tools and access they need to accomplish their goals. Our network seeks to do this through a trauma-informed lens. This work will go together with our current initiatives, to bolster the quality of the early childhood classroom experience.

Request: Mental Health Services: Additional \$4.5 Million Annually

Early Care & Learning Council (ECLC) and the Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) network launched the Infant Toddler Mental Health Consultation (ITMHC) project in 2019. With a current workforce of 42 consultants, the ITMHC program, albeit impactful, has not reached all communities in New York state. ECLC requests funding to increase services to child care providers and children to ensure that our youngest children benefit from nurturing and responsive caregiving in child care settings, prompt identification of developmental and behavioral challenges, and timely referrals and receipt of additional services.

- *Add 14 positions across upstate New York and suburban downstate New York:* Classrooms served by Mental Health Consultants show significant improvements across multiple measurements, including social-emotional learning and developmentally appropriate practices.
- *Add 12 positions in New York City:* The complex regulatory landscape coupled with the density of home-based child care providers in NYC requires a larger network of ITMH Consultants. A larger team of consultants will improve service reach and support the building of trusted relationships--which form the foundation of successful consultations.
- *Add ten supervisors for ITMH Consultants (Four in New York City and six rest of state.* There is a need to expand mental health expertise in the CCR&Rs and hire supervisors from Mental Health disciplines (LCSW, LMHC, Psychology, or related fields).
- *Expand the ITMHC Database to allow for expansion of MHC services into new age groups as interest and capacity are identified within the CCR&R Network.*

Each of these requests¹ will ensure mental health professionals work in collaboration with educators to make certain that trauma informed practices are being utilized in classrooms and that appropriate social emotional strategies are implemented through trauma informed and racial equity lenses.

ITMHC focuses on educators who provide care for children 0-36 months. Consultation is a resource to support adults in making changes to benefit the classroom or program. Consultants refer out for individual child or adult mental health assistance. Consultation is tailored to fit the needs and interests of each program and takes place right in the classroom and at the child care facilities.

From June 30, 2022 to June 30, 2023 over 200 child care programs were served, with over 2,700 children participating in classrooms. Over 3,000 consultative visits were conducted and over 6,000 consultative consulting hours were reported. With additional funds, more child care programs could be served, allowing this impactful intervention to aid the social-emotional development of many more of the state's youngest children.

Turning to the Executive Budget proposal, the Governor identifies several initiatives which will rely upon the CCR&Rs to be successful. This includes piloting Staffed Family Child Care Networks. In 2022, OCFS launched a \$100 Million grant program to start new child care programs and add slots in existing programs across the state. This investment was aimed at diminishing child care deserts across New York. Using Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five funds, NYS initiated a complimentary initiative designed to bolster OCFS's child care desert grant program: ECLC and the NY CCR&Rs invested in the scaling of provider support networks via the pilot of four staffed family child care networks at CCR&Rs throughout the state. CCR&Rs lead a process to recruit and select 25 to 30 registered Family Day Care or Group Family Day Care providers to move to the utilization of child care management software for record keeping and adopt industry financial best practices. The staffed family childcare networks bolstered and modernized the business operations of existing family child care providers, thereby slowing the loss of family child

¹ In the Governor's state of the state and budget release, there was reference to a doubling of Infant Toddler Mental Health Consultants (ITMHCs). Once we spoke with OCFS and dug into the funding, we discovered this is an increase to the contracts that each of the seven infant/toddler resource centers currently hold, as well as the addition of a data administrator for each region. While we are very appreciative of this increase and it will help bolster the work, it is not enough to meet the need of serving more programs across the state. (Note: Infant/Toddler Resource Centers are how our work is referred to in the budget legislation, though funding is work is now both IT and ITMH.)

care providers throughout the state, which has contributed significantly to child care deserts in the last decade.

We support the Governor's proposal to continue this work through more piloted staffed Family Child Care Networks (FCCNs) in regions around the State, with a focus on supporting and growing the capacity of family and group family child care providers. These types of providers operate small programs out of their homes and care for a large portion of children in families participating in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).

CCR&R staff have also served as Technical Assistance (TA) specialists to ensure that child care providers access and utilize stabilization and desert grants available through federal relief funding. As the last of this funding is reappropriated through the budget, we are hopeful to see state funds invested in a permanent raise in compensation for the sector.

Child care workforce challenges are severe and persistent. The average wage for child care workers in New York State—who are almost entirely women and predominantly people of color—is \$35,190, one of the lowest among all professions. Child care providers nurture and educate young children, allow parents to work outside the home, showing up day in and day out, often when it means long hours and sacrificing time with their own families, all for very low wages. Child care providers deserve better than a short-term solution for an already broken system.

Another challenge that we face in New York State is the thousands of low-income families that are unjustly prevented from accessing child care by immigration status rules, lack of non-traditional hour care, and other access barriers. New York must enact policies to ensure that all families can access high-quality, culturally responsive care when they need it. All New York families need and deserve child care.

As members of Empire State Campaign for Child Care, we support the budget and legislative priorities which build from the historic investments of recent years and take New York further down the path to universal child care by investing in the essential child care workforce, removing unnecessary access barriers, and ensuring all the state's children can access child care, regardless of immigration status.

To solve New York's ongoing child care issues, we must follow the path to universal child care for every family in New York State, with a well-compensated child care workforce. So much progress has already been made and we need to continue to build on that momentum. We can offer child care for all and keep our state thriving. Thank you for the opportunity to provide our

comments to you. Early Care & Learning Council and our CCR&R network look forward to continuing to effectively serve the families and communities of New York State.