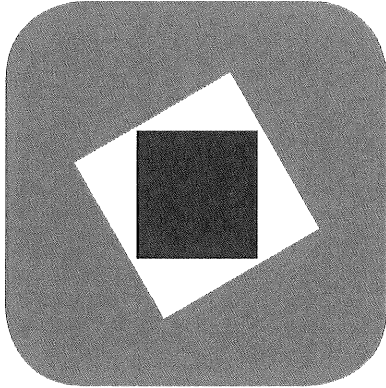


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early care &
Learning COUNCIL

New York's child care resource network

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing on
2015-2016 Executive Budget Proposal:
Human Services**

Submitted by
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and input on Governor Cuomo's proposed budget for New York State. The Early Care & Learning Council is a statewide, not-for-profit organization, whose mission is to promote excellence in early care and education with equal access for all families. We do this primarily through the support of, and in partnership with, a strong network of community-based organizations that provide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services. The Early Care & Learning Council is also a leader within *Winning Beginning NY*, the State's early care and development coalition and fully supports the coalition agenda.

Child Care Resource and Referral agencies have the capacity to bring child care information and support to the work place and to assist directly with employers. Parents can utilize our comprehensive services so they quickly obtain reliable child care that meets their needs and the requirements of their employers. We know where regulated child care exists and where additional capacity has to be developed to support emerging or growing businesses or respond to changes in employer needs. Child care is an infrastructure support for children, for families and for communities.

If the early care and education sector were not supported, there would be many parents who could not work each day, as well as employers unable to operate or expand their businesses. Reliable, regulated, quality child care increases employee attendance, punctuality and productivity. Quality child care is a necessity for both children and their parents. New York State continues to fall short in meeting the need for financial assistance with child care, with thousands of income-eligible families on a formal and informal waiting list for subsidies.

This year we call on the legislature to:

- 1) Invest an additional \$100 million dollars in child care subsidies in the coming year and to implement critical legislative changes to assure equitable access to high-quality child care in every part of the State. Child care can account for up to 50% of the family budget, outpacing even rent or mortgage. In order to allow more low income families to afford child care, please cap parent copayments at 10% of household income statewide.

During the critical first years of life that are the foundation for learning, child care is where early learning and school preparation happens for many children. Therefore, as New York continues to build on its investments focused on improving education and key programs that help prepare children for school, there must also be a commitment to increasing access to quality child care.

- 2) Increase the Executive's \$3 million investment in strengthening the quality of early learning through the implementation of QUALITYstarsNY.

"A quality early education, with play-based learning, hands-on discovery of the real world, and immersion in nature pays off in both the short and long term. Short, because parents of children in such programs are less distracted, more productive workers; and long because the children themselves are more likely to graduate from high school, avoid crime, raise healthy families themselves, and deliver the skills our businesses need. Community Playthings is glad to support this growing consciousness of the importance of quality early education for the business community, and to request support for QUALITYstarsNY and increased funding for subsidies."-Dana Wiser, Design Manager, Community Playthings

Child care is both an infrastructure support for children, for families and for communities, and an avenue for building a strong New York State future. Parents need affordable care that supports their ability to work. Children need early childhood programs that provide a developmentally appropriate early learning experience with a workforce that is both educated and appropriately compensated. And, communities need high quality services to attract and support businesses. But in New York State, there are still too few families that have access to high quality, affordable child care. A recent report by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) cites the cost of child care in New York as among the highest in the nation. Yet, New York State does not provide sufficient financial support to parents who cannot easily afford child care. Funding for child care has continued to decrease each year, despite the economic hardships families are facing and the increasing rate of inflation.

"One of the barriers we have encountered that thwarts our success is the availability, accessibility and affordability of child care. On an average, we have about 3 job placements that fail, or are cut short, each month, due to child care issues. These are cases in which the candidate meets the job qualifications and is eager to accept the position and the employer is satisfied they have found a skilled and competent employee, however the job placement does not happen because of unmet child care needs. This equates to several thousand dollars in lost wages as well as many hours of lost staff time internally as our team works to assist job seekers."- John Calabrese, Owner/President, Mohawk Valley Express Employment Professionals

In 2013, social service districts across the State ran out of child care funding months before the end of the year. Many districts had to lower eligibility levels or stop providing subsidies to new families. These subsidies are often what make it possible for parents with low wage jobs to make ends meet. Without a subsidy, the high cost of quality child care (at least \$10,000 per year per child) is out of the reach for the majority of low income workers, as the average full-time minimum wage worker makes only \$16,680 a year. Without an increase in the state's investment and critical policy changes to improve quality and increase access to the child care system, parents' ability to participate in the workforce, and to provide financial stability for their family and a supportive learning environment for their children will be seriously undermined.

"The Long Island Association supports increased accessibility and affordability of quality child care and early education programs for working families as they are key economic development priorities for both our region and the entire state,"- Matthew Cohen, Vice President of Government Affairs, Long Island Association.

New York's economy depends on quality child care. The regulated child care sector in New York State is a \$4.7 billion dollar industry. It provides nearly 120,000 jobs. Every \$1 spent on early care and education in New York State creates a \$1.86 return on investment that goes back into local economies creating jobs and supporting working parents.¹

An additional \$100 million investment in child care subsidies in 2015-2016 would serve at least 13,000 additional children who are eligible and waiting for access to care. And while we are happy that Governor Cuomo has recognized the importance of quality early child care by including QUALITYstarsNY in this year's executive budget, additional funds are needed to expand the program and continue quality improvement activities through the CCR&R network. Furthermore, please continue to invest in a robust system of afterschool programs that provide care for children at the most critical hours of the day.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments to you. The Early Care & Learning Council and our network look forward to continuing to effectively serving the families and communities of New York State.

¹ S. Schaefer, S. Gates, M. Kiernan, *Strengthening New York Businesses through Investments in Early Care and Education*, America's Edge, p.2 (2010)