



ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

Helping children succeed in school

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Testimony to be delivered to the New York State Senate Standing Committee on Children and Families

Re: Challenges Facing the Child Care Community

Advocates for Children of New York

December 12, 2011

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Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss challenges regarding the state of child care in New York. My name is Randi Levine, and I am an attorney at Advocates for Children of New York, where I focus on early childhood education. For more than 40 years, Advocates for Children has worked to promote access to the best education New York can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

To narrow the achievement gap and provide the best education possible, we cannot wait until children enter kindergarten. Years of research make clear that we must start by providing low-income children with a high quality early childhood education. For many children in low-income families, subsidized child care programs are the only opportunity to participate in early childhood programs. Regardless of whether they are called “child care,” “preschool,” or “prekindergarten,” such programs are critical for school readiness and school success.

Rigorous long-term research demonstrates that programs for preschool-aged children have a profound impact on educational outcomes. Compared to children who participated in an early childhood program for low-income children, similar children left out of the program were 67 percent more likely to have been retained a grade in



school and 71 percent more likely to have been placed in special education classes. Children who participated were 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school than similar children left out of the program and were ultimately more likely to be employed and have higher earnings.

We are deeply concerned about the rapidly shrinking opportunities for children from low-income backgrounds to participate in child care programs in New York City due to lack of funding. Between 2006 and 2010, the city eliminated 14,000 child care subsidies. These reductions have included closing dozens of child care centers and eliminating subsidies for parents who are unemployed and looking for work and parents who are ill or incapacitated. Last year, Mayor Bloomberg proposed cutting an additional 17,000 children from child care programs. While we were pleased that this proposal was rejected, we were disappointed that 59 classrooms were still cut. Furthermore, 7,000 of the child care slots that were restored were funded through one-year City Council funding that ends on June 30, 2012, placing these slots at risk of elimination. The reductions have not only led to reduced capacity for early childhood education, but have made it significantly more difficult for elementary school children in low-income families to access after-school programs.

Now, the city plans to implement its EarlyLearn NYC initiative, which will blend child care funding with Head Start and Universal Pre-K funding. We support the overall vision of EarlyLearn NYC—an early childhood education system with comprehensive, high quality, full-day programs, integrating children with special needs, and expanding capacity to serve infants and toddlers. However, we are extremely concerned that funding is inadequate to realize this vision. With the current



level of funding, the city has acknowledged that EarlyLearn NYC will lead to a decrease in capacity of 3,000 children, in addition to the 7,000 slots at risk of elimination. We are concerned that some of the children who will lose a seat are those who need it most. EarlyLearn NYC gives priority to programs located in zip codes that have the highest concentration of poverty. However, this methodology overlooks the fact that there are pockets of deep poverty, such as public housing developments, located in other zip codes in the city. Unless the city receives additional funding, child care programs serving these communities are at risk of closing.

We are also concerned that the per-child rate in the EarlyLearn proposal is inadequate to support the high quality standards required, in addition to the new requirement for programs to obtain health insurance for their employees, pensions, and facilities costs. Additional funding is needed for high quality programs to implement EarlyLearn's requirements. Continued cuts in child care capacity will only increase the achievement gap that exists between children from low-income backgrounds and their more affluent peers.

Today, you will hear many statistics about the decreasing number of child care slots. Behind each of these numbers is a child and a family. Advocates for Children receives calls from low-income parents who are looking for preschool programs for their children and are surprised to learn that there are no publicly funded preschool programs available for them. We recently received a call from the mother of four-year-old Andrew. Last year, due to Andrew's special needs, the NYC Department of Education placed him in a full-day integrated class where preschoolers with disabilities learn alongside their typically developing peers. Andrew made significant



progress in this setting, and the Department of Education recently determined that he no longer needed a special education seat in the integrated class. One would expect this news to be the source of celebration for Andrew's family. Instead, this news precipitated a family crisis, leaving his low-income, single, working mother scrambling to find a free preschool or subsidized child care seat for her child in the middle of the year. Thus far, his mother has not been successful. She works on a temporary basis and is now being forced to turn down jobs in order to care for her son. Her son went from preparing for kindergarten by participating in a high quality full-day integrated preschool class to sitting at home all day.

Advocates for Children is also working with the family of twin girls with disabilities. The twins should have started kindergarten in September but their single mother is unable to meet their bus after the school bell rings due to her work schedule. She has been unable to find an after-school program that can accommodate the family's needs and, in the meantime, her children have been out of school all year.

We understand that the state is facing a federal shortfall of nearly \$40 million in child care funding due to the elimination of the TANF surplus. The state must fill this gap. At this critical time, New York City cannot absorb a cut in state child care funding. We recognize that these are challenging economic times, but that is precisely why the state must increase child care funding that enables parents to keep their jobs and enables children to prepare for school. Studies have found that high quality programs for preschool-aged children save \$7-\$16 for every dollar invested. Cutting children from child care programs will cause increased unemployment and will cost



taxpayers in the long run in increased remediation, special education, public assistance, and criminal justice costs.

We look forward to working with you to increase funding for child care.

Thank you for holding a hearing to discuss this critical issue and for the opportunity to speak with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.