



**TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEES ON GENERAL WELFARE
AND EDUCATION
Examining the Administration's Plan to
Transfer Kindergarten Children from ACS to DOE**

MARCH 5, 2009

Good afternoon. My name is Andrea Anthony and I am the Executive Director of the Day Care Council of New York, Inc. The Day Care Council of New York is the membership organization for more than 200 nonprofit organizations that sponsor approximately 330 publicly funded child care programs throughout the five boroughs. These private nonprofit organizations are under contract with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to provide daily education and care to infants/toddlers, and young children aged 2.6 to 5 years old. As of January 2009, there were 33,813 young children in center-based programs representing over 62 percent of this system.

I would like to thank the City Council's Chair of the General Welfare Committee, Bill deBlasio, and the Chair of the Education Committee, Robert Jackson and the Committee members for holding this public hearing on the transfer of kindergarten services from the Administration for Children's Services to the Department of Education (DOE).

From its beginnings in 1941, the child care system was formed as a partnership between the city and nonprofit organizations with the intent of helping families who need a safe, educational setting for their children while they are working. We are at a critical juncture in the 58 year old history of the publicly funded child care system. The key word here is "change." But the driving force behind the desire to change the system is solely economic. The Bloomberg Administration's fixation with addressing budget deficits is destroying essential services in the publicly funded child care system. In fact, every Mayoral proposal in recent years, including the eliminating of after school services, the refusal to negotiate for an equitable and fair labor contract for workers, and now the elimination of kindergarten services, has emanated from an objective to save money without any regard to the impact on working families, their children and the dedicated workers in this system. In the entire system, we are talking about the lives of more than 54,000 families, and 6,000 center-based workers. The direct impact of policy decisions driven by budget deficits is weakening, beyond repair in some cases, the fragile safety net it took years for us to create.

The proposed changes bring about concern on many different levels. Our biggest concern is the loss of capacity throughout the entire publicly funded child care system. This proposed cut will reduce the capacity of the system by approximately 3,300 slots. It is inconceivable that the ACS would make such a move when thousands of children are not being served. This is also a time where families are under financial distress and child care becomes the only safety net to support low-income families.

Long term, we understand that transferring five year old children to the Department of Education maybe a better use of resources, but at this time, the safety net designed to support young children, i.e., DOE, ACS, and Department of Youth and Community Development is not equipped to successfully make this transition. Appropriate planning has not been done to assess the impact on families. This transition cannot effectively be done without sufficient preparation for the programs affected and without the financial support to change the capacity to serve younger children. We strongly oppose the current proposal to completely eliminate much needed child care slots in the system. We encourage the Bloomberg Administration to work closely with the City Council to ensure that Federal Stimulus funding designated for child care be used for expansion or conversion of classrooms to meet the growing demands for infant/toddler care. Eliminating kindergarten slots in the publicly funded system does not mean a need does not exist for other age groups. It also does not mean that parents lose their eligibility for child care because the Administration elects to discontinue these services.

Currently, within our membership there are approximately 131 child care programs that serve kindergarten children. These numbers change from year to year. However, given this number of active programs and ACS' admission that more than 3,000 slots will be eliminated, it clearly demonstrates that the programs are addressing a vital need in their community. In late January, we surveyed our membership on the kindergarten proposal and found some disturbing concerns. Of the centers responding, the directors reported that their parents had limited options in their neighborhood to transfer their children; that an OST program did not exist near by; and most importantly, the parents were outraged that the Administration was continuing its attack on the publicly funded child care system. We have attached two letters from a director and a parent that clearly highlights their frustration and fear over what is to come.

We also found that enrollment trends vary from community to community. We found that some of our member agencies have voluntarily chosen to age down because they saw a decline in kindergarten enrollment. They were responding to the needs of the community they serve. As previously stated, we understand that the publicly funded child care system will need to change to respond to the needs of communities; however, as policy makers does it all hinge on how money can be slowly siphoned off the system without any regard to impact on families and their children? There are a number of questions that are being ignored as ACS moves forward on eliminating kindergarten services, such as, what is going to happen to those children that cannot enroll at their local public school? What happens if an OST program does not exist in their area? How are parents going to pay for their child to get from school to an after school provider in the middle of the work day? Who is going to pay for a chaperone?

We urge the City Council to intervene and stop the termination of kindergarten services. If this is not possible, we urge that child care programs be permitted to maintain the slots and use the opportunity to "age down" by enrolling more 2, 3 and 4 year old children. Now is not the time to reduce capacity in the publicly funded system. We have the federal stimulus funding which should be used to support programs that can enhance their services for low-income families. Let's work together to continue offering high quality educational services for our youngest citizens and give them a fresh start.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on this issue.