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DAY CARE COUNCIL OF NEW YORK
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
Committee on General Welfare
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My name is Lisa Caswell and I am the Senior Policy Analyst for the Day Care Council of New York. For seventy years, our non-profit members have maintained quality early childhood education programs for families across the five boroughs. At this time more than 200 of these centers are contracted with the Administration for Children's Services under EarlyLearn. We support them with a range of services that include labor relations and mediation, policy and advocacy, an early childhood career ladder, an employment initiative, and a professional training institute. We are also the lead agency for the state funded Child Care Resource and Referral Consortium. As such, we are uniquely positioned to comment on issues of early childhood education in this year's budget.

Utilization and the Expansion of Universal Pre-Kindergarten

Like all educational advocates, we support the development of a birth to eighteen, full day system, but our support is conditional upon the Administration's recognition of the value of the non-profit early education sector. Our members are struggling to maintain capacity in the midst of the Department of Education's continuing recruitment of UPK children whose parents have chosen to place them in non-profit settings. One provider had to re-seat her UPK classroom four times last fall because parents were receiving phone calls from the DOE where they were promised kindergarten seats the following year. We cannot build one part of this system at the expense of another, particularly one that has such a powerful track record.

The Need for Certified Teachers

We represent our membership in collective bargaining with two unions: the Council of Supervisors and Administrators and District Council 1707. In January of 2016 we released a policy report which substantiated a long standing concern; 51% of our members had teachers who had left their positions for the Department of Education. Although we spent a year negotiating with the City Administration for salary parity for our members' certified teachers, we were not awarded increases that matched the Department of Education's starting salaries or longevity steps. The launch of Pre-K for All has further exacerbated this issue. The starting salary for certified teachers with a Master's degree in the UFT union is \$13,784 higher than that of a similarly qualified teacher in DC 1707. After 5 years of service, DOE certified teachers with Master's degrees will make approximately \$15,413 more than their counterparts in DC 1707.

Child Care Facilities

We recently met with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to discuss the new state rating system that will impact all early education settings. We raised concerns over ongoing fines that our members in NYCHA facilities receive when DOHMH sites them for violations that they are not authorized to address. Our members can only make small repairs, so major repairs end up being significantly delayed, which could impact the grade they receive in this new rating system. We must develop a system of communication between City agencies that ensures that non-profits in NYCHA facilities get the prompt attention they need.

Child care programs located in privately owned buildings, where the rent is paid in full by the City, continue to be negatively impacted by gentrification. Unfortunately, private landlords in many neighborhoods will make more money creating housing for middle and upper income families, instead of leasing to non-profit providers. Why isn't the City using its leverage to make sure that new housing deals include the construction of affordable, quality child care onsite? If we do not act, the cost of space will soon be higher than the cost of operations.

Health Benefits

Fortunately, the recent labor negotiations resulted in more affordable health care benefits, but many workers are struggling to find health care providers within the Health and Hospitals network. In February of this year, we conducted a survey of our members which revealed that 46% of them have some employees who have opted to enroll in Medicaid, instead of MetroPlus. The fact that they are income eligible for Medicaid is disturbing enough.

Early Childhood Career Ladder

We have received funding to establish an Early Childhood Career Ladder scholarship fund, with a very positive response from the workers. Many child care providers indicated in our most recent survey that they would like more professional development and continuing education opportunities. The continuing lack of salary parity poses the single greatest threat to the non-profit early education sector. It is absolutely necessary to continue to fund our Career Ladder, so our teachers have the opportunity for economic mobility.

Conclusion

Without ongoing input from parents, child care providers, and advocates, we will not see the system we are all fighting so hard to build. We would like to thank the New York City Council for its strong support of DCCNY membership over the years. We stand ready to assist you should there be further need of our expertise.