



TESTIMONY

GENERAL WELFARE COMMITTEE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

MARCH 18, 2013

I would like to thank the members of the City Council's General Welfare Committee, in particular Councilwoman Anabel Palma for her exemplary leadership. I would also like to thank the New York City Council as a whole for its unprecedented support of the city's child care system in recent years. Never before have we navigated such challenging terrain, and your efforts to maintain the system's integrity and stability has meant everything to the children and parents it serves. As the largest membership organization within New York City's child care system, the Day Care Council of New York, dating back to World War II, currently serves the interests of 112 non-profit organizations that sponsor 240 child care centers. We are proud of their long standing commitment to providing a strong head start to New York's most vulnerable citizens.

In the recent transition to *EarlyLearn* under ACS, while every effort was made to maximize all available funding streams to maintain both capacity and quality, once health insurance costs were transferred into the rate, our members determined that they were inadequate by 20% across the board. Consequently, these sponsoring boards were unable to contribute more than 80% of the total cost of insuring their workforce, and even with a 5% contribution from the union's welfare funds, these workers faced what has essentially been a salary cut, when asked to come up with the remaining 15% of monthly premium contributions. As a direct result, 54% of the entire workforce opted-out of health coverage completely, rather than experience additional financial stress.

Our members are counting on us to help them maintain quality early childhood education standards and fiscal stability in these challenging times. They have specifically asked us to prioritize the issue of worker compensation. In *President Obama's Plan for Early Education for All Americans*, adequate compensation is one of the five elements of quality assurance, and is specifically defined as parity with K-12 staff. And while no one will argue about the relationship between workforce stability, salary levels, and quality service delivery, the fact that our group teachers regularly transfer from child care to the Board of Education as soon as they receive their Master's Degrees confirms the historic underfunding of this sector.

New York State's long-term strength and stability is dependent upon a well-educated workforce. Had the City Council not stepped in, 10,000 children currently being served by child care programs with long-standing, solid reputations would have lost their seats. These same children are at risk of losing services again this year, as are the 37,000 young people at risk of losing essential youth services.

And while we anticipate possible relief from a new administration, without a broader commitment to early education from all levels of government, we cannot hope to serve more than the 27% of eligible children we are currently reaching. The impact studies are there. The public will is there.

The success of the Campaign for Children can its ability to leverage the full range of skills among advocates from both the youth service and child care sectors. In this spirit, the Day Care Council of New York would like to call for the immediate formation of a bipartisan commission focused on a fiscal strategy for the long-term funding of quality early education and youth service for families from all income levels. The City cannot sustain its increasing investment in these critical services without a master plan that mobilizes effective support from every sector, and at every level. The world has always looked to us for inspiration when it comes to creating opportunity for all of her citizens. We cannot afford to fail them by becoming the haven of a chosen few.