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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
FY 2018 EXECUTIVE BUDGET
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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 more than sixty 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 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 Executive Budget.

Expansion of Universal Pre-Kindergarten

We would like to first state our support for the expansion of Universal Pre-Kindergarten to three year olds, but this support is conditional upon the level of commitment the Administration is willing to make towards solving the problems our members are currently facing. Many of the challenges that came with the decision to blend all available funding streams have been resolved. Funding is no longer based on utilization, making it possible for providers to better manage fixed expenses. Quality technical assistance has resulted in new levels of regulatory compliance, putting the City in a much stronger position when it comes to maintaining critical Head Start funding. But we still need more help to stabilize the system. Some of our member agencies are struggling to find qualified teachers while others have facilities in need of repair.

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. 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. We were able to make changes that led to more affordable health care benefits and received funding for a Career Ladder scholarship fund. Unfortunately, the Mayor's recently announced "3K for All" initiative will likely make it harder for non-profits to hold on to their state certified teachers.

Difficulties in hiring or retaining certified teachers also impact our members' ability to maintain operations at full capacity. One of the reasons center-based EarlyLearn utilization rates are not rising above 88% is because providers cannot staff their

classrooms. In some cases, they also have difficulty recruiting children because of changing neighborhood demographics or competition from nearby non-profits, for-profits, or charter schools. We understand that the “3K for All” pilots in Districts 7 and 23 will be fully implemented in two years. We will be working with the Administration to keep the issue of salary parity at the forefront of all discussions.

Major Repairs Needed in Child Care Facilities

When it comes to facilities, the lack of federal funding for repairs is resulting in regular fines from the Department of Health for non-profits operating in NYCHA facilities. Our members are only authorized to make small repairs, so major jobs end up being significantly delayed. Child care programs located in privately owned buildings, where the rent is paid in full by the City, continue to be threatened by the effects of gentrification. Unfortunately, it is commonly known that private landlords in certain neighborhoods will make more money from housing rather than commercial space. Right now, 28 out of 72 of these programs are operating with month to month leases. Why isn't the City using its leverage to make sure that new housing deals include the construction of affordable, quality child care on the ground floor? If we do not act, the cost of space will soon be higher than the cost of operations.

Conclusion

We would like to restate what we have said in meetings following the announcement of the transfer of the ACS EarlyLearn program to the Department of Education. The success of this critical effort will hinge on the DOE's ability to support community based programming as the fundamental component of a birth to 18 year educational continuum. Without ongoing input from parents, providers, and advocates, we will not see the system we are fighting so hard to build. And it will not meet the needs of New York's families unless it is a full day system that runs smoothly from 8:00 to 6:00, 52 weeks a year. This applies to services for older children as well. We should not have to keep advocating for after-school and summer programming each Spring. Working parents need our help. They cannot afford to do it on their own.

In closing, we would like to state our strong support for the “Sustain Our Sanctuary” campaign. For many of our members, child care is just one of several human service contracts they hold. Regardless of the funding source, it is safe to say that none of these contracts meet the full cost of operations. The Mayor's commitment to a 6% cost of living adjustment (COLA) over three years is a welcome and appreciated start. We hope the Administration will see that the additional 12% across-the-board increase that has been requested is more than reasonable. Now more than ever, New York City must be able to rely on its long standing non-profit partners.

We would like to thank the New York City Council for its strong support of our membership over the years. We stand ready to assist you should there be further need for our expertise.