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Testimony of Day Care Council of New York  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair  
On School Reopening

Presented by Gregory Brender  
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Good Afternoon Chair Treyger and members of the Committee on Education and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Gregory Brender and I am here on behalf of the Day Care Council of New York. For more than 70 years, the Day Care Council has successfully served the needs of non-profit organizations sponsoring early childhood education programs across the five boroughs of New York City.

We appreciate the City Council and this committee's continued commitment to early childhood education. Chair Treyger and other members of the Education Committee fought hard alongside Day Care Council, our member organizations, and other advocates to win salary parity for community based early childhood educators and to improve the new contracts for community based early childhood providers that are now in effect.

Community based child care providers are an essential part of the City's education system and will be essential to any school reopening. The pandemic has laid bare that the City will not be able to recover without a strong child care system.

As early childhood educators, Day Care Council members engage families at the crucial earliest stages of their children's development. The first years of a child's life are the only opportunity to provide them with the social-emotional development and early skills development that supports them throughout their education and throughout their lives. As such, Day Care Council and its network of community based early childhood educators have long recognized that access to strong and stable early childhood education programs has profound effects on students learning and academic achievements.

However, the rapid changes to program and funding models that effectively responding to COVID-19 requires is unprecedented. The pandemic continually increases the demands on community based early childhood education programs in responding to community needs at the same time that it presents meaningful threats to the stability and viability of many longstanding early childhood education providers.

Throughout the pandemic, Day Care Council members and other community based early childhood education providers have:

- **Launched Emergency Child Care Centers:** Community based organizations working with contracts through Department of Education launched 46 center-based Emergency Child Care Center Based child care programs and 72 Family Child Care Emergency Child Care programs. The Emergency Child Care Centers operated similarly to the Regional Enrichment Centers in public school building serving the children of essential workers who are under 5 years old.
- **Developed Remote Programming Options:** Starting in March of 2020, early childhood education programs offered remote classes and engagement. This involved developing new ways to conduct classes online for very young children and providing support to families to help them support their children in accessing remote programming.
- **Opened 5 – Day Per Week Programs.** In September 2020, as public schools including public school Pre-K for All and 3-K for All programs opened using a hybrid model with the week divided between in person and

remote education, CBO early childhood education programs operating with DOE contracts opened 5 day per week programs to meet the needs of working parents.

- **Opened Learning Bridges.** CBO's also opened Learning Bridges programs to provide child care during hybrid learning days to 3 and 4 year old children of essential workers.

Despite this innovative work and the recognition of child care workers as essential workers, New York City's child care system desperately needs increased support in order to ensure that young children will have access to high quality early childhood education.

Early childhood education programs face instability and are struggling to keep their doors open. Many child care programs that are funded through private pay or through vouchers have already closed due to the financial instability of the pandemic.

In order to ensure that the City's plan for school reopening takes into account the needs of its youngest learners, Day Care Council of New York makes the following recommendations.

### **Continue to Pay the Full Value of Early Childhood Contracts Based on Capacity Not Enrollment**

Enrollment in ECE programs has been volatile throughout the pandemic and will likely continue to be so as necessary changes are made in how New York City's economy reopens. Parents who are currently working from home or unemployed due to the pandemic are waiting until further reopening of schools and businesses to re-enroll their children.

Moreover, during the pandemic, Department of Education's Centralized Enrollment System has been experiencing significant backlogs leading to months long wait times for families who have applied for child care. Under the Centralized Enrollment System, parents must apply through Department of Education to enroll their child in a community based program even if that family has a longstanding relationship with that provider such as having an older sibling already enrolled.

For these reasons, current enrollment does not reflect need. As workplaces reopen, parents need to be able to quickly obtain safe, affordable child care for their children. To fill this need, providers must be able to maintain their staff and infrastructure to facilitate a more comprehensive reopening as more parents return to work.

Therefore, Day Care Council of New York urges New York City to maintain funding for contracted center based and Family Child Care programs at capacity throughout the pandemic regardless of enrollment levels.

### **Extend Community Based Enrollment Throughout the School Year**

When contracts for community based early childhood programs were transferred from Administration for Children's Services to Department of Education in 2019, DOE eliminated the authority for community based organizations to process their own enrollment. This change required all families to go through DOE's Centralized Enrollment System.

Under DOE's Centralized Enrollment System, there have been significant wait times for families' applications for child care subsidies to be approved leaving vacant seats in child care centers and family child care homes and putting stressors on parents' trying to access affordable child care. Moreover, many families, including many immigrant essential workers are weary of engaging with a government agency and feel safer with a community based organization with whom they already have a trusting relationship.

Over this summer, DOE has allowed providers to enroll families after the CBO itself has done a complete eligibility check. This has empowered CBO's to start serving eligible families immediately and helped them to leverage their community relationships. However, this is set to end on September 10<sup>th</sup> and will not support child care school enrollment in the school year.

Day Care Council urges DOE to extend community based enrollment throughout the school year.

### **Develop a Remote Option for Early Childhood Programs**

As early childhood educators, Day Care Council members know the importance of in-person learning and teachers, directors and staff are excited to welcome children into their child care centers and family child care homes. We hope that a remote option will not be necessary but we must be prepared to implement one if it becomes necessary.

However, with the pandemic far from over and the possibility of further spread of COVID-19, it is incumbent on the City to ensure that child care programs can stay connected and remain a support for families in the case of either a future shutdown or if individual families or staff members need to quarantine.

Day Care Council of New York urges DOE to work with providers to develop plans in collaboration with child care providers to ensure that if a remote option becomes necessary, it can be quickly and effectively implemented.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. We greatly appreciate the City Council's work to support early childhood educators and welcome the opportunity for further collaboration. I can be reached for any question at [gbrender@dccnyinc.org](mailto:gbrender@dccnyinc.org).