



**Testimony of the Day Care Council of New York
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Rita Joseph, Chair
At the FY 2023 Preliminary Budget Hearing**

Presented by Gregory Brender, Director of Public Policy

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Thank you Chair Joseph and the members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify. My name is Gregory Brender and I am here on behalf of the Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY), the membership organization of New York City's early childhood education provider organizations.

As providers of early childhood education, DCCNY members engage families at the crucial earliest stages of their children's development. The first years of a child's life are the first 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, DCNNY and its network of community based early childhood educators and caregivers have long recognized that access to strong and stable early childhood education and care programs has profound effects on students' learning and academic achievements.

DCCNY and its members also recognize that reliable and quality child care is a necessity for working parents and thus a necessity for the City's recovery from the economic devastation of COVID-19. For New Yorkers to return to work, families with young children must have places that are safe, nurturing and educational when parents are working, including those parents who work non-traditional hours.

The City Council and this committee are an important voice for New York City's early childhood education sector and we are excited to work with you to strengthen early childhood education in New York City.

The Unfinished Work on Salary Parity

In 2019, the City made an historic commitment to put the City on a path towards salary parity between the early childhood education workforce in community based organizations and the workforce in public schools. While this agreement was a significant first step, the work remains unfinished.

As of September of 2020, certified teachers in community based organizations are earning salaries on par with the *starting salaries* of teachers in the public schools. Community Based Organizations are not funded to offer their teachers the longevity increases that public school teachers receive. This inequity

remains stark. A certified early childhood educator in a community based organization may earn only 53% of what a similarly experienced certified teacher earns for the same work in a public school setting. This stark disparity presents a constant challenge to organizations looking to retain teachers who have developed expertise in early childhood education from their years of experience.

The unfinished work of salary parity also includes the directors and support staff in community based early childhood programs who continue to receive significantly lower salaries than their counterparts in public schools. Many centers struggle to retain directors who could earn more as a DOE teacher than they can as a community based director.

DCCNY urges the City to close the remaining wage gaps on the path to parity so that the hardworking early childhood workforce can finally earn the compensation that their important work deserves.

Enrollment Based Payments

When the Department of Education released its Birth-To-Five and Head Start / Early Head Start RFPs, members of the City Council and leaders in the ECE community raised significant concerns and objections to DOE's plans to pay providers based on enrollment and to implement enrollment procedures which limited enrollment exclusively to DOE's Centralized Enrollment System.

Under this system, CBO providers had no guarantee that they would be able to serve families who wished to enroll their children in CBO programs and faced financial peril if they were underenrolled.

These issues have been exacerbated by volatile enrollment throughout the pandemic. Enrollment will likely continue to fluctuate as necessary changes are made in how New York City's economy reopens. Some parents who are currently working from home or are unemployed due to the pandemic, are waiting until further reopening of schools and businesses to re-enroll their children.

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.

Recently, the Department of Education has taken steps towards holding providers harmless for underenrollment in Fiscal Year 2022. DCCNY is grateful for this reform and for DOE and the City Council's leadership on this issue. It is crucial that the City takes action to stabilize its community based early childhood education providers beyond this fiscal year. DCCNY urges the City to implement line-item budgeting for contracted early childhood education programs in FY 2023 as they work to return their operations to pre-pandemic stability.

Improving Enrollment Procedures

As previously discussed, the implementation of DOE's Centralized Enrollment System stripped community based organizations of the power 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 those of 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. Many prefer the smaller environments that community based centers provide over their DOE school-based options.

Over the summer of 2021, DOE briefly allowed providers to enroll families after the CBO itself has done a complete eligibility check. This empowered CBO's to start serving eligible families immediately and helped them to leverage their community relationships. However, this policy ended with the start of the school year on September 10, 2021.

Local community based early childhood providers have strong connections to the neighborhoods they serve. The City should leverage these strong relationships to ensure that families are able to quickly access the child care programs in which they want to enroll their children.

DCCNY urges the City to allow community based enrollment in contracted early childhood education programs.

Looking Ahead

DCCNY is excited to work with the City Council to ensure that all of New York City's children and families have access to strong and stable early care and education.

Last week, the New York State Assembly and New York State Senate issued their "one-house" budget resolutions expressing the priorities of the respective houses for the State Budget starting April 1, 2022. We are thrilled that both houses proposed investments of over \$3 billion to put New York on a path to universal child care and proposed long overdue regulatory changes that will remove unnecessary obstacles that families face in trying to obtain child care. DCCNY, our members and allies, and many members of the City Council are working hard to ensure that this important funding is included in the Enacted Budget.

As the City works to implement changes from the State or to enact its own early childhood policy agenda, it is crucial that the community based organizations who provide early childhood education are included in planning. DCCNY member organizations are hubs of innovation with deep histories and connections to the communities they serve. These organizations must be fully and stably funded to ensure the stability of services for children and families. DCCNY and our member organizations stand ready to work with the City to achieve an early childhood system that meets the needs of NYC families and businesses, teaches children to succeed and respects and fairly compensates the ECE workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for all your work to support early childhood education. DCCNY's policy platform is attached to this document. I am happy to answer any questions and can be reached at gbrender@dccnyinc.org.



Day Care Council of New York FY 2023 New York City Platform

The Day Care Council of New York is a membership organization of New York City’s early childhood education providers. New York City’s early childhood education system is at a pivotal moment. Below are immediate steps that the City leaders must take to strengthen early childhood education for New York City’s children and families.

Invest in the Early Childhood Workforce

- Fund longevity increases for teachers in community based early childhood education programs
- Address salary disparities between directors and support staff and their counterparts in public schools
- Increase rates for child care for infants and toddlers
- Support career advancement for early childhood teachers, directors and staff

Address Service Gaps

- Ensure all neighborhoods have access to Extended Day and Extended Year programs based on work schedules
- Increase center based capacity for child care for infants and toddlers

Improve Enrollment Processes

- Suspend the Department of Education’s (DOE) Pay for Enrollment policy which penalizes providers financially for temporary fluctuations in enrollment
- Allow community based organizations with Department of Education contracts to directly enroll families
- Increase income eligibility for child care subsidies (currently at 200% of Federal Poverty Guidelines) and reduce or eliminate burdensome paperwork requirements for families seeking child care

Commit to Working with Community Based Organizations in Planning Reforms to Early Childhood Education

- Ensure that community based organizations have a voice in planning early childhood policies and procedures

You can also find further explanation of these agenda items in Day Care Council of New York’s report [“Supporting New York City’s Unsung Heroes: How the Next Administration Can Prime the Early Childhood Workforce for Success”](#) and Campaign for Children’s Policy Platform [“A Call to Action: The Campaign for Children’s Plan for Incoming City Leaders”](#)