



**Testimony of Day Care Council of New York  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education  
Honorable Eric Dinowitz, Chair and  
The Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education  
Honorable Jennifer Gutiérrez, Chair  
Oversight: The Path to Universal Child Care**

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Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and Chair Gutiérrez, and members of the Committee on Education and the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education, for the opportunity to testify. Over the past several years, the City Council has fought hard to save child care centers threatened with closure and to increase the salaries of teachers, directors, and support staff in community-based child care centers and home-based programs. We know that many of you share our excitement about Mayor Mamdani's commitment to expand early childhood education and the historic investments that Governor Hochul and Mayor Mamdani have proposed. We are counting on you and all our partners in government to ensure that this expansion stabilizes and strengthens early childhood education provider organizations and the early childhood education workforce.

The Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) is the membership organization of early care and education providers across New York City. DCCNY envisions a future in which all children have access to high-quality early childhood education and that providers and their workforce have the tools and resources needed to deliver it.

DCCNY supports its members and the broader early childhood field through policy research and advocacy, labor relations and mediation, workforce training and professional development, and referral services for families seeking child care. Our member organizations operate more than 200 sites across all five boroughs.

Most DCCNY member organizations contract with the New York City Public Schools, while others rely on child care vouchers issued by ACS and HRA, federally funded Head Start contracts, or private funding. Collectively, DCCNY member organizations employ over 4,000 New Yorkers – predominantly Black and Brown women - and serve children and families citywide.

### **Early Childhood Expansion**

Governor Hochul and Mayor Mamdani recently announced several historic investments in early childhood education, which have since been included in the Governor’s Executive Budget Proposal. These include:

- The launch of 2-K in both community-based organizations and with home-based providers in New York City, beginning this year in two school districts,
- Completing the unfinished expansion of 3-K, and
- A \$1.2 billion State investment in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) that can get families off waiting lists for vouchers and expand access to desperately needed Expanded Day/Expanded Year programs in community-based organizations.

These investments will only succeed if early childhood providers and the workforce have the infrastructure needed to operate sustainably. DCCNY looks forward to working with the administration and City Council to ensure that these expansions create stability for early childhood education provider organizations and fair compensation for the early childhood workforce who have been undervalued for too long.

### **Support the Early Childhood Education Workforce**

In every type of early childhood education setting, the workforce is underpaid and underappreciated. The early childhood workforce is overwhelmingly women, and in New York City, it is overwhelmingly women of color. Yet teachers, staff, directors, and home-based providers continue to earn significantly less than their counterparts in public schools.

This means that people who have the skills, knowledge and education to be great early childhood educators, leaders, and support staff often cannot and do not stay in their roles because they cannot sustain their lives with lower salaries.

In order to address these inequities and ensure that child care provider organizations can attract and retain a quality workforce, DCCNY offers the following recommendations:

- 1) **Establish consistent expectations for pay based on experience:** Establish a defined career ladder for early educators and an articulation of appropriate compensation at each rung of that career ladder.
- 2) **Set a wage floor:** The city can define a minimum wage for child care workers that recognizes their labor and the skill required. This would, in particular, benefit teaching aides and staff in other support roles whose salaries are currently pegged to the citywide minimum wage.
- 3) **Use contracts to drive toward parity across settings:** The city can work with labor and management to address inequities in the current collective bargaining agreements. Notably, future contracts should include longevity increases comparable to what UFT members earn, and provisions to address the longer day and year that many child care center teachers work. Contracts should include cost escalators so that salaries can keep up with inflation and COLAs.
- 4) **Establish a wage fund:** As part of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care, DCCNY is advocating for a dedicated fund to increase child care worker compensation at the State level. A fund like this on the city level could close the gap between what families are able to afford to pay for care and what programs need to appropriately compensate their workforce.

#### **Provide universal health insurance coverage for child care workers**

- The city could expand health care coverage by providing access to free or very low-cost insurance plans inclusive of the center-based and home-based workforce. In the past, the city had a health insurance program that CBOs could opt into. The city should revisit this model and determine how it could be made more effective.

#### **Expand access to pension plans**

- A majority of early childhood educators do not have access to employer- or union-supported retirement plans and are unable to save for retirement themselves. There are some existing publicly-supported retirement systems, including the Cultural Institutions Retirement System (CIRS), which already includes some child care workers. The city could work with CIRS to expand eligibility criteria, allowing more private child care programs to opt in for their employees.

### **Provide housing support**

- City workers are already eligible for priority in housing lotteries, including public school teachers. However, this priority does not currently include child care workers. The city could create specific priorities within the Department of Housing Preservation and Development's affordable housing lotteries to ensure that child care workers have the same priority as other categories of essential workers.

### **Create career exposure and dual enrollment training programs for high school students**

- As NYCPS continues to expand opportunities for workforce development and career exploration in high school, there are opportunities to expose high school students to child care work and give them opportunities to work in early childhood programs. Programs of this type have the dual benefit of attracting new people into the child care workforce, while also filling immediate gaps in staffing.

### **Launch a city-funded apprenticeship program**

- New York City could develop a city-funded apprenticeship program that matches current and aspiring caregivers with existing home-based or center-based programs to give them paid, on-the-job learning opportunities while simultaneously matching them to low-cost or tuition-free credential programs. New York already has a robust infrastructure in place to support apprenticeships across sectors. Given the fragmentation in child care and the small scale of most child care programs, an apprenticeship program would likely have to be driven at the sector level by the city or an intermediary, like DCCNY, rather than by individual child care programs.

### **DCCNY also urges New York City to work with New York State to:**

#### **Speed up the background check process for new staff**

- The city must continue to focus on expediting the background check process so that teachers can begin working in programs faster. The city should also explore making background checks portable. Currently, educators must go through the background check process again if they start at a new program, which may inhibit some educators from staying in the field. There is some precedent for expanding portability; currently, staff can work at different sites operated by the same organization. Moving to full portability would require state action.

### **Experiment with new credentialing models**

- Across the country, including elsewhere in New York, community colleges are introducing new stackable micro-credentials to support current or aspiring early childhood educators who are looking to enhance their qualifications, but may not have the time, budget, or interest to work toward a full degree. With buy-in from the city that micro-credentials could be tied to pay increases for early childhood educators, community colleges and child care programs could work together to develop coursework that addresses specific learning gaps they are seeing in the workforce. For child care workers, this could be a mechanism to build particular skills and be compensated for it.

### **Create substitute teacher pools**

- When a child care worker is absent, programs typically must scramble to maintain coverage. Child care centers that contract with the city can access NYC Public Schools substitute teachers. However, they are required to pay those substitutes the UFT-negotiated rate of about \$50 an hour, which is more than centers can afford - and highly problematic internally when their own substitute teachers and support staff earn minimum wage (or \$18 per hour, if subject to DC-37's CBA). New York City could launch its own substitute pool, in collaboration with the state or on its own.

### **Stabilize Early Childhood Education Providers**

Despite the overwhelming enthusiasm for early childhood education, child care providers continue to struggle day to day to keep their doors open and pay their bills on time. New York City must take action to support the organizations and small businesses that provide early childhood education.

In order to stabilize community-based early childhood education providers, DCCNY offers the following recommendations:

#### **Ensure On-Time Payments**

- DCCNY is grateful to Chair Gutierrez and the City Council for the passage of legislation that will provide greater transparency on how quickly contracted early childhood education providers are paid. The City must continue to work to secure on-time payments for providers by reducing regulatory burdens and fully staffing the Division of Early Childhood Education.

#### **Increase advances to 75% of contract value.**

- Center-based providers with contracts for Pre-K, 3-K and Extended Day/ Extended Year programs are guaranteed at least 75% of contract value under the Birth-to-Five contracts; advancing the guaranteed portion would improve cash flow and allow for more effective planning and budgeting.

**Hold providers harmless from enrollment-based penalties while NYCPS controls enrollment.**

- As long as enrollment is managed through a centralized system, providers should not be penalized for under-enrollment, consistent with protections afforded to early childhood programs operating in public schools.
- Center-based and home-based programs should be held harmless for under-enrollment when NYCPS' district schools are held harmless for under-enrollment in their 3K and Pre-K classrooms.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We are happy to answer any questions and can be reached at [gbrender@dccnyinc.org](mailto:gbrender@dccnyinc.org) and [slohr@dccnyinc.org](mailto:slohr@dccnyinc.org).