



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## SENATORS URGE STATE TO IMMEDIATELY ADDRESS CHILDCARE NEEDS

SUSAN SERINO September 1, 2020

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Albany, NY – With school districts across the state opting to delay the start of in-classroom instruction, New York’s parents are scrambling to find and afford appropriate childcare options. Senators Sue Serino and Pam Helming today announced that they will introduce legislation aimed at providing financial relief to families and incentivizing providers to reopen and expand their services to meet the growing demand.

The lawmakers are also reiterating their **demand** on the state to release the \$69 million of federal CARES Act funding that has been specifically earmarked for childcare. Several months ago, \$70 million in CARES Act funding was provided to New York to support childcare, but to date, reports indicate that only \$1 million has been used.

**Senator Sue Serino said**, *“The state has put parents in an impossible predicament by failing to fully and effectively support school districts to enable a safe return to the classroom. With many districts delaying the start of in-person education to October, and even more adopting reopening plans that only bring children into the classroom a couple days each week, my office is being inundated with calls from parents desperate for affordable, safe childcare options. Albany cannot afford to drag its feet on this critically important issue—working parents need effective solutions and they need immediate relief.”*

**Senator Pam Helming said**, *“Families across our State are struggling to find affordable and safe childcare this fall. The cost and accessibility of childcare has long been an issue, however, the COVID-19 Pandemic has made it that much worse. During my time in the Senate, I have worked with numerous local providers to expand access to affordable childcare and support them in their efforts to recruit teachers and staff for these programs. However, we must do more, especially now. That is why I am proud to work with Senator Serino to introduce this comprehensive package of bills that will expand childcare access for families across our State. We have a responsibility to these children and their parents. I applaud Senator Serino for leading this effort and putting her real world experience to work in resolving this critically important problem.”*

Before the pandemic, it was **already being widely reported** that day care costs across the state were skyrocketing as safe, affordable slots were in short supply and half of the providers across the state were reporting waitlists. The problems of affordability and accessibility of childcare in the state are only being exasperated as a result of the pandemic as many childcare providers remain closed or are limiting capacity to allow for social distancing.

According to Care.com’s 2020 ‘Cost of Care Survey,’ 72% of parents surveyed say they spend 10% or more of their household income on childcare. Additionally, 55% of parents surveyed say they spend at least \$10,000 per year on childcare, which is significantly more than the

average annual cost of in-state college tuition in New York. For many New York families, the start of the school year typically brings relief from the bulk of these costs as school-aged children spend most of the week in the classroom.

However, in keeping with health and safety guidance mandated by the state, school districts were charged with developing re-opening plans based on the resources and needs of the local community. While some districts are returning to fulltime in-person instruction, most are choosing to provide all-remote instruction or are offering a combination of in-person and remote learning, a decision that has sent working parents into panic-mode as they search for safe, affordable childcare options that can accommodate these disjointed schedules.

In the coming days, the lawmakers will introduce the '**COVID-19 Family Relief Act**,' which aims to provide financial assistance to families for additional childcare expenses directly related to the schedule of the local school district. The bill would require the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to utilize unused CARES Act funding to make direct payments to licensed childcare providers on behalf of parents who choose to utilize these services. The payments would cover childcare expenses for eligible families for any hours a child would otherwise have been in school. OCFS would be empowered to develop an application process that considers a family's ability to pay for childcare services to determine program eligibility.

In addition, the lawmakers will push for additional legislation that requires the state to create a **reimbursement program for childcare providers** to help incentivize their safe reopening or expansion in order to meet the increased demand and help providers afford necessary health and safety upgrades. Specifically, the program would make costs associated with hiring and training additional qualified staff, expanding center space, and paying for health and safety upgrades eligible for reimbursement by the state for the 2020-2021 school year. The bill would require the providers be reimbursed by the state for qualified expenses within

thirty days.

The package also includes a measure that would **permanently increase the current New York State dependent care tax credit by 50%** in an effort to provide direct tax relief to families who have been struggling with rising childcare costs.

*Serino, who has extensive experience working as a childcare provider concluded saying, “Childcare has never been more essential. Being a working parent is challenging in the best of times, but now, as we continue to grapple with the added stressors brought on by the pandemic, we need to do all that we can to empower working parents and provide our childcare heroes with the tools they need to safely provide high-quality care for our kids.”*