



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham and Mayer, Advocates Call for Increased Child Care Support in State Budget

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Mount Kisco, NY – New York State Senators Pete Harckham and Shelley B. Mayer, along with a number of advocates that included Kathy Halas of the Child Care Council of Westchester, held a press conference on Friday, February 26, and called for increased funding and support for child care providers and working families in the state budget for next year.

Noting that child care providers and working families that depend on child care have been hammered by the pandemic, Harckham said, “It is time for New York to step up and do its share to help. The state has underfunded child care for years. If we are serious about post-pandemic economy recovery and fully reopening schools, then we have to put safe child care within reach of all New Yorkers.”

Boosting child care support from the state by \$485 million in the 2021-2022 budget, as requested recently by the Day Care Council of New York, will benefit both parents and child care centers, Harckham said. For parents, it would create more slots for children, cap co-pays and change eligibility requirements for subsidies (that two minimum wage parents no longer qualify for).

And for child care centers, the added support will allow increased workforce compensation and return the fee level back to 75% of market rate (the current 69% level does not cover costs) and pay care providers for a portion of the days when children are absent because of illness or holidays (since slots cannot be filled on short notice).

“Lack of affordable, quality child care is affecting a staggering number of families in Westchester: 1 in 5 adults are not working due to Covid-19 related child care issues, and that includes 1 in 3 women,” said Mayer. “We must relieve the pressure on working parents, particularly mothers, who cannot work without the security of affordable, quality child care for their children. We need to expand child care subsidies in the year’s state budget and ensure necessary federal funds are dispersed swiftly to local providers. Our economic recovery post-pandemic is dependent upon a robust and thriving network of local providers. I am committed to working with Senator Pete Harckham and other colleagues to continue our fight for affordable, quality child care throughout New York.”

Both lawmakers said that the \$469 million of federal stimulus being earmarked for child care needs to get into hands of child care providers and parents, in partnership with each county’s subsidy system.

About 100,000 children are served each month by the New York State child care subsidy system. But that number is down 30% from 10 years ago. In Westchester, it’s down 40%. The biggest reason is that many Westchester families—and families around the state—are over the income eligibility cut-off (\$52,300 gross) for subsidies.

Among those also speaking at the event, which was held here at the Mount Kisco Child Care Center, were Dawn Meyerski, the center’s executive director; Westchester Legislator Kitley Covill; Howard Milbert, executive director of the Ossining Children’s Center; Adrienne Harper, owner of Jump for Joy Day Care in Peekskill; Cynthia Bolding, owner of Blessed Beginnings Childcare in Mount Vernon; and Polly Peace, executive director of the Country Childrens Center in Katonah.

Several parents with children now attending child care facilities in Westchester also spoke about their experiences and the incredible stress connected to holding on to jobs while dealing with unreliable child care, as well as trying to manage tight household budgets impacted by child care costs.

“It’s not that equitable access to quality child care can solve every challenge we face right now, but it checks a lot of boxes—parents return to work, employers have a reliable workforce and children develop socially, cognitively and emotionally,” said Halas. “New York State has the opportunity right now, with this budget, to build the child care system we need to get out of this Covid-19 hole and come back stronger.”