

submitted testimony



early care &
Learning COUNCIL

New York's child care resource network

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing on
2012-2013 Executive Budget Proposal:
Human Services**

Submitted by
Marsha Basloe
Executive Director

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and input on Governor Cuomo's proposed budget for New York State. The Early Care & Learning Council is a statewide, not-for-profit organization, whose mission is to promote excellence in early care and education with equal access for all families. We do this primarily through the support of, and in partnership with, a strong network of community-based organizations that provide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services. The Early Care & Learning Council is also a co-convenor of *Winning Beginning NY*, the State's 200-member strong early care and development coalition.

Child Care Resource and Referral agencies have the capacity to bring child care information and support to the work place and to assist directly with employers. Parents can utilize our comprehensive services so they quickly obtain reliable child care that meets their needs and the requirements of their employers. We know where regulated child care exists and where additional capacity has to be developed to support emerging or growing businesses or respond to changes in employer needs. Child care is an infrastructure support for children, for families and for communities. Parents need affordable care that supports their ability to work.

The 2012-2013 Executive Budget contains \$904 million for child care, reflecting a loss of federal funds. The Early Care & Learning Council and *Winning Beginning NY* support and applaud Governor Cuomo's preservation of \$93 million in child care subsidy funds. This commitment will maintain 19,000 child-care slots for working families.

Counties are coping by reducing eligibility levels, increasing parent copayments and closing intake altogether creating long waiting lists. Child care can account for up to 50% of the family budget, outpacing even rent or mortgage. New York State continues to fall short in meeting the need for financial assistance with child care, with tens of thousands of income-eligible families on the waiting list for subsidies. New York needs to create a subsidy system that bases parent co-payments on their ability to pay and ensures equitable eligibility rules across the state. The child care subsidy allocation formula must also be examined. A careful examination of legally-exempt providers will also be necessary.

The Executive Budget calls for a state investment of \$215 million in child care preservation funds for fiscal year 2013-2014. We ask that New York State make an advance on that investment

to meet the needs of families struggling to work and pay for child care now by beginning to serve more children and building a quality, stable system of care.

Research tells us that the foundation for success in school and in life is developed well before a child enters kindergarten. In fact, a child's earliest experiences are responsible for wiring the brain for future use. Long term educational achievement is uniformly linked to participation in high quality early care and education. In the long-run, high quality early childhood programs are self-financing; in the short-run, a significant portion of program costs are offset by savings in remedial programs.

According to Upjohn Institute Economist Tim Bartik, after 20 years, high-quality early childhood programs provide more than enough added revenue and savings in government costs, to more than cover their program costs. Earnings go up in the long-run, which increases tax revenue. Welfare program usage goes down. Crime goes down, which saves on prison and police costs. Quality child care increases school readiness increases and lays the foundation for success in school and in life.

Even in the short-run, high quality early childhood programs reduce the need of some kids for special education services. These special education services can cost up to \$10,000 extra per year, for up to 13 years during the K-12 years. Conservative projections indicate that within 10 years after a high-quality early childhood program begins, over half its program costs will be covered by reductions in special education costs. Quality child care also allows nearly 70 percent of our local workforce to go to work each day. Their productivity on the job keeps our businesses running and enables residents to buy homes and pay taxes to support our growing community.

With lackluster test scores, a high dropout rate, and low GED pass rates, we must invest earlier in our students. **We must invest, in fact, before they ever set foot in a school!**

We know that 75% of brain growth and 85% of intellect, personality and social skills develop before age five. And research from institutions such as Harvard University, the National Economic and Law Center, and Committee for Economic Development all agree that early care and education is a proven strategy that closes the preparation gap for academic achievement and is

the foundation to long-term success by way of higher graduation rates and post-secondary education, better paying jobs and more productive adults.

Research by the American Academy of Pediatrics tells us that children who attend high-quality early childhood programs demonstrate better math and language skills, better cognition and social skills, better interpersonal relationships, and better behavioral self-regulation than do children in lower-quality care. Children exposed to a poor-quality environment are less likely to be prepared for school demands and more likely to have their socio-emotional development derailed.

The way to measure high quality programming is through a Quality Rating and Improvement System. The State recently applied for an Early Learning Challenge Grant, the guidelines of which stipulated that states ensure that more children enter Kindergarten ready, with the healthy cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills and potential necessary for success. New York State was not one of nine states awarded a first round Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant. This was in large part due to the lack of a fully functional Quality Rating and Improvement System in New York State (QSNY) that would support the efforts of early learning and development programs to improve the quality of their services and to give parents the information they need to make a more informed choice. Now that significant work has been done to create an early learning and development system, the State must invest to implement it to be poised for future opportunities. QSNY will provide a pathway to improve existing early learning programs, with the goal of increasing the number of low-income young children who participate in higher-quality settings.

Both the Early Care & Learning Council and *Winning Beginning NY* believe that in this time of fiscal crisis our State must preserve, protect, and increase access to high-quality early care and learning programs. These programs are essential for children's success and our State's economic recovery. Therefore, we urge the State to invest \$20 million for Year 1 implementation of QUALITYstarsNY (QSNY), to provide direct and indirect program improvement supports. QSNY is a star rating and improvement system created to drive current and future state investments toward quality improvements in early learning programs, a strategic approach to ensuring both public and private dollars are used most effectively and efficiently to promote better outcomes for children. This cost burden, as well as benefits, can be shared by multiple state agencies that are influential

to the lives of our youngest citizens-our future workforce. While New York has developed QUALITYstarsNY (QSNY), the program has not been implemented statewide due to the lack of state funding. New York must be proactive and not reactive in its approach to educational achievement. Without mechanisms in place to measure and increase quality in the early years, student achievement will continue to languish.

Twenty million dollars is needed overall to begin implementation of QSNY throughout the state. These funds would be invested in quality assessment, monitoring and administration, professional development, technical assistance, financial incentives, public awareness, system evaluation, and data system development. Full statewide implementation of all of QSNY's components would be phased in over a five-year period, requiring a total state investment of \$100 million.

Research clearly documents the importance of the first three years of life in shaping the emotional, social, and cognitive development of children. Our future prosperity depends on the health, education, and workforce productivity of our citizens and the foundation for all of those is laid in the infant and toddler years when brains are developing rapidly.

With approximately 55% of all young children in New York in child care, there is a compelling need to focus specific resources on our very youngest learners. The seven Regional Infant Toddler (IT) Resource Centers serve every county in the state by promoting excellence in IT services in all settings. The IT Centers offer direct services to the early care and education community including intensive technical assistance, training, coaching, resource information, and linkages to other social and community supports. The Early Care & Learning Council has supported and guided best practices in each of the Regional IT Centers, mentored and trained the IT specialists, and helped set statewide goals and guidelines for further development. We ask that you look at increasing investments to Infant & Toddler Resource Centers in order to provide services to our most vulnerable population, our infants and toddlers, the future generation. The quality of caregiving relationships and early experiences determines the richness of early brain development and lays the foundation for success in school and in life.

Development of a healthy child requires attention to both the mind and body, which includes physical health and well-being. Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. Childhood obesity has both immediate and long-term effects on health and well-being. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, children who became obese as early as age 2 were more likely to be obese as adults. The dietary and physical activity behaviors of children and adolescents are influenced by many sectors of society, including families, communities, schools, and child care settings. Healthy lifestyle habits, including healthy eating and physical activity, which can lower the risk of becoming obese and developing related diseases, need to begin in early child care settings.

Child Care Health Care Consultants are integral to the vision of ensuring healthy practices are in all child care settings. Child Care Resource and Referral Health Care Consultants assist child care programs in developing and monitoring Health Care Plans and Policies that are consistent with New York State regulations and safe health practices. The Health Care Consultant also serves as a resource by providing technical assistance to child care programs in developing and maintaining appropriate health care procedures and safeguards. With additional funding, the Early Care & Learning Council can provide statewide coordination for this group of licensed professionals that are committed to developing a solution.

As the New York State government plans for the future, I hope it will think about including plans to support the development of a quality child care system that will create both short term and long term success for our youngest learners and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments to you.