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## Testimony of the Alliance of New York State YMCAs

Presented to the Joint Budget Committee on Human Services

February 12, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the FY25-26 Executive Budget proposal.

On behalf of the 35 YMCA Associations and 140 branches across the State, the Alliance of New York State YMCAs advocates on behalf of policies and initiatives that help youth develop into the healthy leaders of tomorrow, prevent and combat chronic disease, and foster holistic health supports in New York State communities.

The Y has a long history of meeting the pressing needs of local communities by delivering a range of programs and services, including: universal pre-kindergarten and early child care to families of all incomes, before/afterschool care and other out-of-school time offerings, swimming instruction, youth sports opportunities, housing for low-income individuals, programs that promote social connectedness among seniors, and evidence-based health interventions.

Our testimony today will highlight the crucial role of early care and education, and school age child care programs in the lives of children and youth. **Child care and afterschool programs foster positive outcomes. Now more than ever, robust state investment in these programs is necessary to support the future generations of New Yorkers.**

### **Before/Afterschool**

Before/Afterschool programs for school age children infuse social and emotional development with academic enrichment, allowing kids to express their creativity and receive support in a nurturing environment. Collectively, YMCAs are the largest provider of afterschool and summer day camp programs in the State.

The Alliance is very grateful to the Legislature for the \$1 million line-item investment that the New York State YMCA Foundation received in last year's budget, which enabled Ys to provide community-based programs such as child care, water safety, and public health initiatives. **This year, we**



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**respectfully request a \$4 million increase, for a total of \$5 million, to ensure Ys can continue to support communities across NYS. This allocation would help to sustain the aforementioned programs and initiatives, as well as help Ys to continue operating high quality afterschool and community-based programs.**

The Alliance joins our partners at the NYS Network for Youth Success to elevate additional afterschool budget priorities. **We request an additional \$180 million to strengthen the Learning and Enrichment After-School Program Supports (LEAPS) grant**, ensuring that eligible but currently unfunded LEAPS applicants receive the support they need (\$155 million) and that crucial gaps in services for middle and high school students are addressed (\$25 million).

With the consolidation of the Advantage and Empire programs, many afterschool providers, including YMCAs, have lost state-funded afterschool contracts. This has caused disruptions for programs and families, unnecessary uncertainty for working parents who rely on programs as a safe, enriching space for their children after school hours. While we are very grateful to the Legislature for the investments it has made in the afterschool sector, the need continues to outpace availability – with eight children in need of afterschool care for every available program slot in some parts of NYS.

Investing in afterschool programs, particularly for middle and high school students, is not just about filling a gap – it's about providing a structured environment, academic support, and mentorship during a critical development period. Adolescents face increasing academic pressures, social challenges, and, most alarmingly, a growing youth mental health crisis. Afterschool programs offer a protective factor, keeping young people engaged in positive activities, providing access to caring mentors, and fostering social emotional development. Without these programs, too many young people – particularly those from underserved communities – are left without safe spaces, increasing the risk of disengagement, academic struggles, and negative outcomes. We applaud the Governor's recognition of the importance of youth mental health, and support the expansion of youth mental health training. YMCAs are uniquely positioned to lead meaningful change in youth mental health. In January, YMCAs began a pilot program designed to promote the development and implementation of youth mental health policies and practices within YMCA school-age childcare sites. The



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that includes increased resources for staff training, including Youth Mental Health First Aid – a training recently elevated by Governor Hochul – and enhanced Social Emotional Learning Programs.

By strengthening LEAPs and expanding access to programs, New York State can make a smart, forward-thinking investment in youth development, academic success, and mental health support.

### Early Child Care

The Y has always focused on meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of young learners so they can grow into the leaders of tomorrow. Early learning, child care, and out-of-school time offerings are staffed by nurturing adults and provide a safe, clean environment for children to learn and thrive.

Child care at the YMCA offers social and emotional development and early learning opportunities that enable parents and family members to go to work. The Y is committed to providing quality full-day and partial-day early care and learning opportunities. And, with Ys operating 400 OCFS licensed child care programs across the State, the Alliance supports a meaningful investment in the child care system and the child care workforce.

On behalf of YMCAs across the State, the Alliance is grateful for the Governor's proposed \$110 million in capital funding for the repair and construction of child care sites.

In the 2025-2026 Budget, we call on New York Leaders to make the following additional investments in child care:

- Provide sustained and reliable compensation and benefits to all members of the child care workforce (\$1.2 Billion)
  - o Create a permanent state fund to increase child care worker compensation. This fund should be robustly resourced and sufficient to offer all members of the child care workforce a significant boost in income; and
  - o Develop a plan for subsequent years to establish a minimum pay scale and career ladder based upon agreed upon criteria. This pay scale will inform compensation and supplement levels after the base pay scale for all has been increased.



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- Ensure ALL New Yorkers can access child care, starting with guaranteeing child care assistance (CCAP) to eligible low-income New Yorkers (\$400 million).
  - o Make child care a state-funded entitlement for eligible families making less than 250% of the federal poverty threshold and increase state funding for CCAP to account for growth in the program.
  - o End New York's rule that denies CCAP to families if parent(s)/caregiver(s) earn less, on average, than minimum wage.
  - o End New York's rule of tying CCAP to parent(s)/caregivers' exact hours of work.
- Help eliminate barriers to accessing child care for children with developmental delays and disabilities (\$5 million).
  - o Increase the enhanced rates for children with special needs to 130% of the market rate (up from 115%) and take steps to make it easier for child care programs to receive the enhanced rate.

**As a leading nonprofit committed to strengthening community, we emphasize how the economic infrastructure of the State can be reinforced and even improved with meaningful investment in our child care system.** Approximately 72% of participants in YMCA programs received a child care subsidy (as of 2023). Investments to make child care

more accessible and affordable is key. There is a multifaceted impact of a meaningful investment in the child care system – on children, on families, and on communities.

### Conclusion

The Y is the leading nonprofit committed to strengthening community by connecting all people to their potential, purpose, and each other. Working locally, we focus on empowering young people, improving health and well-being, and inspiring action in and across communities.

For additional information, please contact Maggie Collins, Director of Public Policy, Alliance of NYS YMCAs, [mcollins@ymcanys.org](mailto:mcollins@ymcanys.org).



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