



**Testimony**

**2015 Joint Legislative Hearing**

**Human Services Committee**

**Jenn O'Connor and Kristen Kerr**

**Co-chairs of Winning Beginning NY**

**February 4, 2015**

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Thank you, Members of the Committee, for giving us the opportunity to testify today.

As the co-chairs of Winning Beginning NY, we represent a number of organizations and individuals across the State who support investments in children from the prenatal period through age eight. The continuum of services for children and their families begins with maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting and includes high-quality child care, Pre-K, afterschool, and early intervention.

While these early childhood services are linked and should not be discussed separately, for budgetary purposes we will limit our testimony today to three areas.

First, home visiting. The Healthy Families New York home visiting program has been flat-funded since 2008. While on its face this appears not to be a cut, it actually amounts to a 15% cut to services that prevent child abuse, promote success in school, and save money. We must invest adequately in prevention if we are to appropriately lay the foundation for school and for life. We urge you to restore \$3.5 million in funding so that programs can

retain staff, restore fatherhood initiatives and other community outreach endeavors, and continue to keep serving our most at-risk families.

We are also asking for \$2 million for evidence-based and promising programs such as the Parent-Child Home Program, and we support a \$2 million increase in the Health Department Budget for the Nurse-Family Partnership home visiting program.

Second, child care. This situation is urgent. In 2013, social service districts across the State ran out of child care funding months before the end of the year, requiring districts to lower eligibility levels or stop providing subsidies to new families. These subsidies are often what make it possible for parents with low wage jobs to make ends meet. Without a subsidy, the high cost of *quality* child care (at least \$10,000 per year per child) is out of the reach for the majority of low income workers, as the average full-time minimum wage worker makes only \$16,680 a year. Without an increase in the state's investment and critical policy changes to improve quality and increase access to the child care system, parents' ability to participate in the workforce, and to provide financial stability for their family and a supportive learning environment for their children will be seriously undermined.

Therefore, we ask that you invest an *additional* \$100 million in child care subsidies to serve at least 13,000 additional children who are eligible and waiting. Further, we request that you expand the investment in child care to reach \$2.2 billion annually by the year 2020 in order to close the gap, cap parent copayments at 10% of household income statewide, and pay providers for absences. (These last requests are detailed in accompanying materials.)

Third, QUALITYstarsNY. The Executive has put \$3M in the education budget, but our support of this program is worth noting at this table. All children deserve appropriately-funded and well supported early learning programs that promote their optimal development and learning. QUALITYstarsNY evaluates program quality and provides the necessary supports to help these programs meet research-based standards that ensure children are receiving high-quality early learning experiences and that build a foundation for success in school and in life. An investment in QUALITYstarsNY will allow the State to ensure that its current investments in both child care and Prekindergarten are building the foundation that support success for all New York's young children.

We thank you for your time.