



THE CHILD CARE CRISIS IN NEW YORK STATE

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Report prepared by the Office of Senator Jabari Brisport and the Alliance for Quality Education. We would like to thank all the child care providers, local administrators, advocates, and families who opened their doors to welcome us on this Universal Child Care Listening Tour and provided data to compile this report.

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The Alliance for Quality Education is a coalition mobilizing communities across the state to keep New York true to its promise of ensuring a high-quality public school education to all students regardless of zip code. Combining its legislative and policy expertise with grassroots organizing, AQE advances proven-to-work strategies that lead to student success and echoes a powerful public demand for a high-quality public school education for all of New York's students. We give special thanks to Jasmine Gripper (Executive Director), Marina Marcou O'Malley (Operations & Policy Director), and Stevie Vargas (Upstate Campaign Coordinator).

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THE CHILD CARE CRISIS IN NEW YORK STATE

INTRODUCTION

New York's child care infrastructure is in crisis: many parents have no access to affordable or quality care and many child care providers earn below the minimum wage. Decades of treating and funding child care as a private service rather than vital public infrastructure has left the system on the verge of collapse. Although some piecemeal approaches and temporary solutions have kept New York's child care system on life support, many child care centers have already been forced to close, and parents are struggling to access the child care they need. Today, where child care is still available, it is largely due to a dramatically underpaid workforce overwhelmingly made up of women—especially Black women and women of color—who are paid wages that leave the majority in or near poverty. The COVID-19 pandemic has only made matters worse, making plain the many weaknesses of our child care system.

With the intent to confront this serious issue, Senator Jabari Brisport and members of AQE spent ten weeks from September through December of 2021 touring New York to hear directly from child care providers and parents. This report details what we encountered through that extensive process, the many nuanced details of this crisis we discovered, and what it will take to address them.

CHILD CARE TOUR BY THE NUMBERS

10 weeks

47 elected officials

28 child care programs (17 center-based, 11 family-based)

10 zoom conversations

1,012 zoom participants

230 survey responses from parents and providers

53,109 views and **7,151** engagements on social media

Countless smiles and songs with children

FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

- 1** Child care is too expensive
- 2** Means-testing harms low- & middle-income families
- 3** Means-testing creates problems for agencies & child care providers
- 4** Most New Yorkers live in child care deserts
- 5** New Yorkers need choices of child care programs
- 6** Child care subsidy rates are insufficient & impose unmanageable costs on families
- 7** Providers cannot currently pay adequate salaries
- 8** New York needs to rapidly develop its child care workforce to scale up
- 9** Child care providers & teachers feel the deep-seated inequities of a system that treats them differently than other educators
- 10** Physical space is desperately needed
- 11** Many families need transportation solutions to access child care
- 12** Child care must include infants & toddlers
- 13** Temporary supports do not address the underlying problems

TAKEAWAYS

CHILD CARE IS TOO EXPENSIVE

The cost of enrolment in child care is far too high for most families and the financial burden for child care impacts both low- and middle-income families.

Child care for an infant or toddler could cost a family over \$2,600 a month or \$21,000 annually—this is more than the cost of college tuition at CUNY or SUNY. Wrap-around care or afterschool care can also be very costly. Parents can be expected to pay over \$1,000 a month to have access to care from 3-6 pm, to ensure their kids are safe from the time school ends until the end of their workday.

We heard parents talk about having to choose between paying for child care and paying their mortgage or other bills. We heard from families who maxed out credit cards or sold possessions to be able to pay for care.

This high cost of child care has also forced many women to give up their jobs. Governor Kathy Hochul—who co-chaired the Child Care Availability Task Force prior to becoming Governor—shared her own story of how the issue has impacted her during the tour: “I was one of those moms who loved my job, who could not find child care, definitely not afford child care, and as a result I had to leave a job that I cared about very deeply. That was a generation ago. Fast forward to today, my own children are old enough to be having children, and the crisis has not gotten any better.”

MEANS-TESTING HARMS LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME FAMILIES

When families send their children to Kindergarten, they aren’t obligated to tell anyone about their income or family composition—every child has the right to go to school once they reach school age. But until then, any family that can’t privately cover the full cost of child care must complete hours and hours of paperwork to determine if they are eligible for assistance through a process known as “means-testing.”

During our listening tour we found that, in addition to being a time tax on low-income families and child care providers, means-testing often entirely prevents parents from accessing child care.

We heard story after story on this tour of parents who struggled for months trying to find their way through a dehumanizing maze of paperwork that failed to account for the realities of their lives. One parent stated that she applied in January but didn’t get a determination for months, and then was forced to repeat the process all over again. She faced further paperwork because her hours of employment vary. After this additional paperwork was rejected because her employer didn’t sign it in the right spot, this parent gave up on the process after nearly a year in.

In another case, a parent applied for subsidized child care on behalf of two children; despite having the same parents, one sibling was approved and the other was not, because the

applications were reviewed by two different administrators.

In addition to the administrative and logistical burdens means-testing places on families, many families who desperately need child care subsidies are determined to be ineligible on the grounds that their income is “too high.” For example, a member of the Child Care Council of Westchester told us that a Westchester family of four, where two parents each work forty hours per week for minimum wage (\$14/hour), will **not** qualify for subsidies, and **center-based care will cost 55.4% of their income.**

We heard from parents who lost child care when they became employed because they were suddenly “over-income” to receive subsidized child care, but still not earning enough to pay for child care on their own. This process traps parents in unemployment or in low-wage jobs, because if they earn one dollar more than the amount that is set for the subsidy, their family will lose access to the child care they need in order to go to work.

This was an especially troubling issue for essential workers, some of whom were forced to work overtime shifts during the pandemic, but ultimately **lost** money by working those shifts, because the temporary extra income caused them to lose their child care subsidy.

“ I chose not to pursue a promotion within my organization due to the uncertainty of who would be watching my kids if I had less flexibility with my work hours (and limited or no work from home ability) and the significant increase in cost if I had to pull them from home daycare and use a daycare center.

SURVEY RESPONDENT

MEANS-TESTING CREATES PROBLEMS FOR AGENCIES AND CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

In addition to the issues means-testing causes for parents, we also heard story after story on this tour of the problems it causes for providers.

One of the most significant was how much time is taken up dealing with the extra paperwork. **Many providers, particularly family-based providers, told us they regularly stay up until midnight after a full day of work, just to process additional paperwork that’s required by administrative agencies.** The center-based programs likewise often have large administrative staffing levels or a small and overwhelmed group of individuals who bear this responsibility.

Providers regularly expressed their frustration at the confusing and time-consuming paperwork, as well as the built-in delays that come with these types of administrative reviews. One child care provider reported that they were so dissatisfied with New York’s child care subsidy system (which they described as being plagued by red tape and bureaucracy) that they would prefer to deal exclusively with the federal government.

In several candid conversations, local administrators acknowledged that they similarly wished that our child care system didn't have means-testing requirements, which are difficult and costly to process.

Our public school system does not impose such burdensome means-testing requirements, but our current child care system does in ways that impede our ability to deliver quality child care.

MOST NEW YORKERS LIVE IN CHILD CARE DESERTS

Across the state we heard from parents about their struggles to find child care facilities with openings to accept new enrolments. Many of the high-quality programs we visited reported extensive waiting lists, where parents didn't have many other nearby options. In fact, **several of the programs we visited were started by parents specifically because they had been unable to find child care for their own children.**

In some regions, we were told that there has been a loss of as many as 50% of the providers over the past decade, with infant care programs suffering in particular. One provider that we visited had 142 applications this past year for just 5 open slots, and another had 250 applications for just 27 available slots. A father in Central New York expressed that when he found out that his wife was pregnant with their second child, his immediate reaction was panic about getting onto child care waiting lists.

Sixty-four percent of New Yorkers live in a “child care desert,” where there are either no available child care providers or far too few providers to meet families’ needs.¹

The issue is even worse for parents who work outside conventional business hours. Even in places that still have programs that care for children during the normal workday (or part of it), **it is extremely difficult to find child care providers who can provide service during other hours.** This isn't just a problem for these parents in their day-to-day lives (which is the most important problem to us), but also for New York's broader economy.

Although some providers have interest in expanding into larger spaces or additional hours of operation, they do not currently have the support to do so. They are already working all day and into the night, and often don't have the spare time and money required to open a larger center to serve additional children. Additionally, real estate and rent costs are prohibitively expensive in most cases, especially in New York City.

Greene County has lost 58% of its child care programs in the last 10 years.²

NEW YORKERS NEED CHOICES OF CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

For ten weeks we heard parents and providers reporting that there isn't a one-size-fits-all mode of child care. We heard about the lack of programs that are open outside the typical nine-to-five weekdays, which puts strain on essential workers who need child care during nights and weekends. We heard about the lack of availability of programs set up to meet the needs of children with disabilities and a lack of support for the programs that do exist. We heard about the need to have programs where teachers and providers speak the languages of the families and operate in a way that reflects different cultures and backgrounds. We heard that the available options are too limited. Overwhelmingly, New York families reported feeling frustration with having little or no choice when it comes to child care programs.

“ I am trained as a physician. Meeting the demands of my job and taking care of my kids was not possible, so I resigned from my academic medicine faculty position and now run a small direct patient care practice from home. My ability to serve my community with my skills is markedly reduced due to lack of adequate child care.

SURVEY RESPONDENT

CHILD CARE SUBSIDY RATES ARE INSUFFICIENT AND IMPOSE UNMANAGEABLE COSTS ONTO FAMILIES

New York State calculates how much it will spend on each child in need of a subsidy based on a “market rate survey,” not the actual cost of quality child care. This system was established to determine payment rates for child care subsidies, but was done in a manner that fails to account for the true cost of programming, effectively contributing to the under-funding of child care programs. Child care providers and administrators repeatedly mentioned the difficulties caused by New York's current “market rate survey” system.

Because of this, many providers either do not enroll children that receive subsidies, or they offset the financial loss of enrolling these students by increasing tuition for the families that do not qualify for subsidies. **Rather than using a progressive taxation system, so that the wealthiest among us bear the costs, we are effectively passing the costs on to poor and working families that are barely outside the range of eligibility for subsidies.**

This cost-shifting system does not make economic sense and creates a perpetual cycle of “operating in the red” where providers and teachers alike are not able to make ends meet. Sixty percent of the providers who responded to our survey reported that they had to deal with unfair and below-cost reimbursement rates and delays in receiving them.

PROVIDERS CANNOT CURRENTLY PAY ADEQUATE SALARIES

The most consistent issue we heard is that our child care workforce is not being paid sufficiently, due to a lack of funding from New York State and the federal government. As the Task Force Report noted, **“much of the child care workforce lives in poverty” with “65% of child care providers receiv[ing] such low wages that they are eligible for several social safety net programs such as food stamps or Medicaid.”** This is not just an injustice, but also a tremendous vulnerability. As we were repeatedly reminded on this tour, many professionals either do not enter the field at all or are forced to leave it for higher-paying jobs at places like fast-food chains or telemarketing companies.

It’s not uncommon for child care workers to need to work a second job. For instance, one family-based child care director that we met also worked part-time for the U.S. Census. This effect of insufficient pay is made even worse by unsustainable levels of overtime work.

One Long Island center manager shared that she had to remove herself from payroll in order to continue to pay her staff a living wage.

Many of those who run child care centers told us that they take home little or no income at all for their labor, in order to keep their doors open and pay their staff as much as they can. The head of one child care facility we visited reported that she has essentially worked without pay for three years. Where New York has failed to act, local members of the community have struggled to contribute their own time, money, and energy towards keeping this facility operational (e.g., painting the walls, fixing the boiler, paying for medicine, etc.). Although this is, on the one hand, a very touching example of community engagement and solidarity, it is also a frustrating indictment of the cruelty of New York’s failure to address the child care crisis.

Because child care providers are not able to pay sufficient wages, almost every site we visited faced issues with staffing levels. It is difficult to provide quality care when a facility is short-staffed, and the **staffing shortage can lead to the facility operating at less than full capacity.** Multiple directors we visited told us that they had to turn parents away until they could get the required staff to meet the mandated staff-to-child ratios. New York under-values and under-pays its child care workforce and the inevitable result is a lack of child care. It is also demoralizing and leads to child care workers facing extreme financial stress in addition to the stress of their jobs.

“ [One of my struggles is] making sure to be able to have enough money to stay afloat to pay rent and utilities as well as payroll and being able to hire more employees.

SURVEY RESPONDENT

NEW YORK NEEDS TO RAPIDLY DEVELOP ITS CHILD CARE WORKFORCE TO SCALE UP

In some regions of New York State, the need for child care is **double** the existing supply. We heard countless stories of child care providers managing lengthy waiting lists. At the same time, workers in the industry face educational debt and the need to perform unpaid labor to meet certification requirements.

In the Capital Region, we visited the sole child care facility serving an entire town. The provider told us the biggest barrier she would face if she tried to expand and serve more children would be finding more quality staff. When we asked her staff about their experience becoming child care workers, several of them told us about how difficult it had been to afford to go through the training and certification requirements. One of the staff members explained that she struggled to make ends meet throughout the process while also caring for a chronically ill loved one.

Becoming a child care worker is an investment that is impossible for many, and—combined with the disincentivizing effect of low pay—not worthwhile for others. The legacy of having underfunded child care for so long is that there simply aren't enough qualified early child educators. To build a stable child care system, we not only have to adequately pay child care workers, we must also now rapidly invest in growing the child care workforce to meet the need.

CHILD CARE PROVIDERS & TEACHERS FEEL THE DEEP-SEATED INEQUITIES THAT COME FROM INADEQUATE WAGES & A SYSTEM THAT TREATS THEM DIFFERENTLY THAN OTHER EDUCATORS

Throughout this tour, the child care workers we met told us that they felt disrespected. **The low wages that they receive seem to be a symptom of a society that does not value them or their work, instead stereotyping what they do as a job that requires no serious training or skill.**

To be perfectly clear, our child care workers are educators, just like our public school teachers are, and they need to be treated as such. The experiences that infants and toddlers have in the first few years of their lives, in their interactions with child care workers, will lay the neurological groundwork for cognitive growth and healthy physical, social, and emotional lives. The skill and expertise required to work in child care is clearly taken for granted.

The failure to recognize and pay child care workers as educators has also contributed directly to the staffing shortage. One issue we heard a lot about in NYC was that, because the NYCDOE can pay a higher salary to its employees, child care employees who can get certified tend to move to work for the NYCDOE. **One director said that it is frequently the case that she will train child care workers, and they will simply leave for higher-paying jobs with the NYCDOE as soon as they can.** She would like to be able to pay her staff an adequate wage, but she simply cannot compete.

We later heard from labor unions about various efforts to have child care workers achieve pay parity with public school teachers (particularly from DC37, which represents Head Start educators), and it is clear that New York still has a long way to go before it achieves full pay parity for all of its early child care educators, assistants, and staff.

“ In the child care industry we are taken for granted; and when you take something for granted long enough...it will soon disappear. Unfortunately, that is what is happening.

SURVEY RESPONDENT

PHYSICAL SPACE IS DESPERATELY NEEDED

Almost all child care providers have struggled with acquiring and paying for physical space in which to operate. Particularly in areas like New York City, Westchester, and Long Island, real estate prices are unaffordably high, and landlords charge rents that prohibit child care providers from offering adequate care.

Some important exceptions to this general trend include the providers who operate within buildings owned by public universities (e.g., SUNY and community colleges) and public housing developments. The ability to access these kinds of spaces lessens the burdens of rent and utility payments. This is a tremendous advantage and makes these institutions particularly important hubs for child care in their local communities.

Unfortunately, New York’s historical disinvestment in public housing and other public institutions provides its own challenges. One child care provider we visited that was located within a NYCHA complex had the lights off in the halls because of a water leak and told us that they were continuously struggling with recurring mold due to state and federal disinvestment in public housing.

In moving forward, we will need to prioritize supporting these public institutions, with both capital and operating expenditures, as important hubs for child care in our communities.

MANY FAMILIES NEED TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS TO ACCESS CHILD CARE

Across the state, but especially in more rural areas, parents are facing a lack of transportation to get kids safely to child care. We even heard about families with no other option but to send their children in taxis.

One provider told us she badly wished they could provide transportation as part of her program, but said the expense—particularly astronomical insurance costs—made this impossible. Another provider told us that she intentionally opened her program on a bus line because of this issue, but she noted that very few other providers have that option in her area.

This problem is especially acute with wrap-around care. Many Pre-K programs end in the middle of the standard workday; even parents who are fortunate enough to have child care available for the rest of the day still face the challenge of getting their kid to the child care program while they have to be at work.

CHILD CARE MUST INCLUDE INFANTS & TODDLERS

Throughout the tour, it was repeatedly made clear that the care of infants and toddlers is costly and difficult. Child care providers often lose money caring for toddlers and infants, and are able to stay open only because they also care for older children. If New York moves forward with Universal Pre-K (“UPK”) and 3-K For All (“3-K”), providing care for three- and four-year-old children in a way that excludes family-based providers—and leaves providers on their own to care for infants and toddlers without assistance—they won’t be able to operate.

One provider described caring for infants as a “loss leader.” He noted that because it is common for child care providers to lose money by enrolling infants, many only do so in the hopes that the family will continue enrolling their child when they are older.

Although these same providers overwhelmingly support the efforts of New York State and the federal government to implement programs like UPK and 3-K, they have expressed very clearly that they will have difficulty operating if such a program is implemented without **also** including them in the conversation.

TEMPORARY SOLUTIONS ONLY OBSCURE THE UNDERLYING PROBLEMS AND DELAY THE MOVE TOWARDS UNIVERSALITY

Throughout the tour, we heard from providers about the impacts of various temporary funding streams. While these have been a lifeline at times, by and large, they have left child care providers in a state of perpetual anxiety, struggling to keep their heads above water between grants.

For the facilities that we visited, the most successful program was clearly the “Child Care Stabilization Grant” that was made available through the federal American Rescue Plan Act and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, and implemented by New York State’s Office of Children and Family Services.

However, we also met providers who didn’t qualify for the grant for technical reasons or who have been mired in paperwork that has slowed down the process. One provider had not been able to access stabilization grant funding because she had changed the location and name of her organization right around the time of the pandemic. Her program could lose out on eligibility for tens of thousands of dollars in badly-needed funding on a technicality.

Child care providers who have received the stabilization grant told us repeatedly how worried they are about how they will make ends meet to stay open when their stabilization grant funding expires at the end of 2021.

Temporary support ostensibly aimed at “stabilization” cannot resolve the child care crisis while the foundation of the system itself remains unstable.

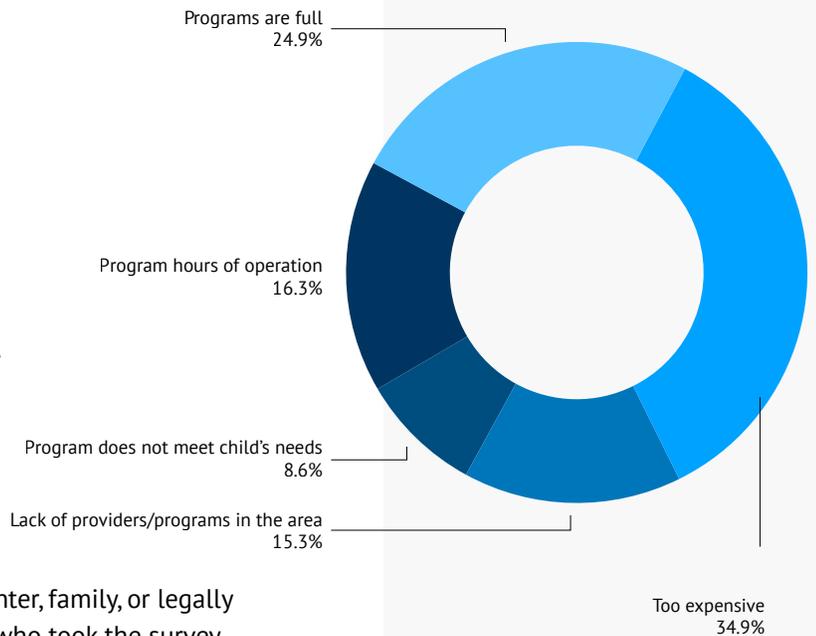
THE THE SURVEY RESULTS

In connection with our statewide tour of child care facilities, we conducted a survey of parents and child care providers (in both Spanish and English) so that we could compile some easy-to-digest statistics, and also collect additional stories from people who were not able to join us in person or virtually on the tour. Below are some of our more notable findings from this survey:

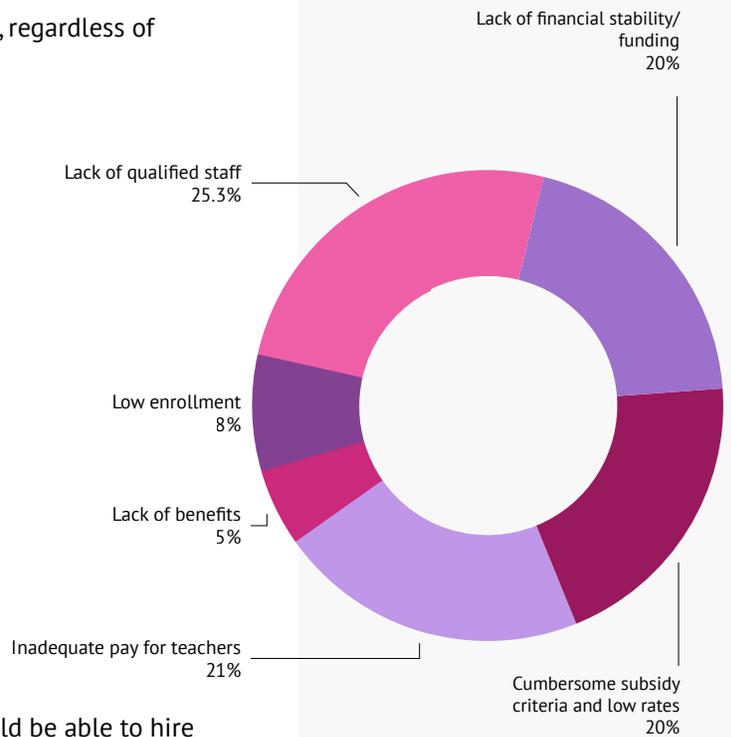
- The overwhelming majority of parent survey respondents have their children in center- or family-based programs.
- 92% of respondents note that they trust center, family, or legally exempt providers. Yet many of the parents who took the survey identified obstacles in accessing child care that cannot be overcome. They have identified cost, inadequate number of programs to accommodate demand, hours of operation, living in a child care desert, and programs not being equipped to meet their child’s needs as the biggest obstacles in accessing child care programs, regardless of modality or setting.
- 67% of respondents identified that child care availability or affordability has impacted their career and work prospects or opportunities.
- Notably, 90% of respondents reported that they have received subsidies for child care, but 67% of them noted that they have had problems becoming eligible or receiving it.
- Almost 80% of respondents reported that they would have liked to stay home with their newborns for approximately 4 to 6 months.

Similarly, we asked providers to tell us about the obstacles they are facing. Overwhelmingly, issues around staffing and financial stability dominated the survey. Providers noted in the survey that if the state invested more funding in child care they would be able to hire more staff, pay them more, and expand their programs and facilities to be able to serve more children.

OBSTACLES TO ACCESSING CHILD CARE



PROVIDER CHALLENGES



TOUR STOPS

BROOKLYN

The first part of our Universal Child Care Tour focused on Brooklyn, where we visited the **Helen Owen Carey Child Development Center** in Park Slope, **Greenpoint Garden Playhouse** in Greenpoint, and **Bay Ridge Child Care Center** in Sunset Park, as well as **Cornerstone Daycare Center** and the **Katmint Learning Initiative** in Bedford Stuyvesant. We were joined by Sen. Julia Salazar (Chair of the Committee on Women's Issues), AM JoAnn Simon, and AM Emily Gallagher, as well as staff from the office of AM Stefani Zinerman.



[Subsidies] don't come even close to meeting the cost of care for a child in our program. With family programs, it is attendance-based, not enrollment-based. If a child is gone for a week, I don't get paid...I cannot tell my staff they don't get paid this week. I wish I could offer all spots to subsidies but I can't afford it, because it just doesn't meet the cost of operation.

**BROOKLYN PROVIDER,
FAMILY-BASED PROGRAM**

I am a parent of a child with autism. I find when it comes to child care, specific programs that service children with disabilities are rare. There should be a lot more of them. It's rare to find someone who has expertise with children with behavior challenges or who know about de-escalation techniques or even recognize behavior as a form of communication...Early intervention will allow our children to have a better chance to develop their own skills...[but parents] are on waitlists for months, sometimes years, for these particular organizations that specialize in early intervention programs and supports.

MOTHER IN BROOKLYN



For many kids, they haven't been in a formal structure setting until they come to us. And so that's where we're going to see special needs, way before kindergarten. It's a lost opportunity because we're not equipped, we're not getting the supports to get them what they need. And yet we have to serve those kids. And to families and those kids, it's a disservice.

QUEENS PROVIDER, CENTER-BASED PROGRAM

We [providers] need mental and emotional support, because this job is a 24/7 job. They think we're finished at the end of the day after the kids go home, no! There's a lot of paperwork to do that has to be completed. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed. I go to bed very late, sometimes midnight, 1 o'clock.

QUEENS-BASED PROVIDER AND CHILDCARE ADVOCATE

QUEENS

For our Queens portion of the tour we visited **Sunnyside Community Services** in Sunnyside, **Harmony Day Care** in St. Albans, and **Little Clappers** in St. Albans. We were joined by the Senate Deputy Majority Leader Sen. Michael Gianaris, Sen. Leroy Comrie, staff from the office of AM Catherine Nolan, and by AM Andy Hevesi.

Throughout the day and into the night's roundtable discussion, similar problems were repeatedly raised. Parents and providers noted that the Universal Pre-K program in New York City has limitations in terms of its hours of operation, and needs to be supplemented with care during the afternoon hours. Special education is often unsupported. Family-based providers face significant insurance costs and are often overwhelmed with paperwork. One provider, in particular, regularly stays up until midnight to finalize all of her necessary forms. And although staff is paid \$15/hour, the providers themselves are taking home only about \$4/hour in compensation for their own labor.

MANHATTAN AND STATEN ISLAND

Our next stop was Manhattan and Staten Island. We visited **Grand Street Settlement** in the Lower East Side and **Mother Hale Nursery** in Harlem. We were joined by Sen. Brian Kavanagh, staff from the offices of AM Harvey Epstein and AM Yuhline Niou, and AM Andy Hevesi.

Queens is fortunate enough to have access to some community-based organizations that offer a multitude of services, including early child care services. These community hubs are able to offer a wide variety of services, although they also struggle with accessing funding and support from government agencies to stay operational. To the extent that such quality care programs exist, there are also extensive waiting lists.

They tell me, you can't get child care because you're not working. But how can I work if I don't have anyone to watch my kids? I can't leave my kids in my house by themselves... I can't work because I don't have child care, but I can't get child care because... I ain't working! No matter how much I think about it, I cannot make it make sense.

MANHATTAN-BASED MOTHER

It takes me more than 45 minutes to drop off my daughter [at child care] and go back to the bus to go to my job. I found out I'm on a waiting list that could take 3 to 4 years. I don't know how to make this work. It takes more than an hour and a half every day just to drop off my daughter, back and forth.

MOTHER IN MANHATTAN



[Parents] are going back into the workforce and they have to choose, am I gonna pay my daycare or am I gonna pay my rent? It's very hard. We do a lot to try to make sure we're meeting their needs. We're not just providers... we're helping families go back into the economy, we're helping ourselves keep a roof over our head, we have our own children. There's so much that we're doing. We're working from 7 am to 6 pm, mostly we don't have a break... We are the ones that are helping to move the economy. We need support.

BRONX DAY CARE PROVIDER

The process is just not structured with providers in mind. I believe the initial issue stems from a lack of respect for our industry in general. I think that's demonstrated by poor pay, no long-term industry-wide benefits or retirement solutions. We are predominantly women-owned, and women of color. Women are already an underpaid population. But in the childcare industry we are taken for granted. And when you take something for granted long enough, it will soon disappear. I choose to do this. I want to do this. But if I can't feed my family, I have some honest choices I have to make.

DAY CARE DIRECTOR IN THE BRONX



THE BRONX

Our fourth tour stop was the Bronx, where we visited **Little Giants Daycare** and **East Side House Settlement**. We were joined by Assembly Speaker AM Carl Heastie, Sen. Jamaal Bailey, Sen. José Serrano, and AM Andy Hevesi.

LONG ISLAND

Next we visited Long Island, which included Nassau and Suffolk County. We toured **Uniondale Early Childhood Center** in Uniondale, **Innovative Daycare Corp** in Freeport, and **Meacham Childcare Center** in Elmont. We were accompanied by Sen. Kevin Thomas, Sen. Anna Kaplan, Sen. John Brooks, AM Michaele Solages, AM Judy Griffin, AM Taylor Darling, and AM Andy Hevesi.

To the extent that there are interactions with government officials, it is all too often frustrating and adversarial. One provider explained how it took her three months to get approval for the children's menu. She was required to get three cost estimates for the meals, despite the fact that vendors are generally unwilling to provide that service for a small child care provider. Another described how administrators had pushed back against her use of a popular electronic attendance tracking system, rather than a paper attendance tracking system. Some providers, particularly those that serve minority populations, find themselves frequently cited by government officials for minor violations rather than actively supported.

We need to realize the importance of the cognitive development, social skills... interaction that children need with their peers, and how daycare is a pathway and foundation for children's educational success. Although my husband and I have decent-paying jobs, we are struggling to keep up with the cost of child care. We are looking for second jobs just to keep up with the weekly cost of child care.

MOTHER WITH DAUGHTER
IN A FAMILY-BASED PROGRAM



We have child care desserts here in Suffolk County. Daily I get phone calls from people desperate for a spot, but we're full... every day I'm figuring out how to pay quality people to come and work, keep them when the benefits are so unaffordable for us, and at the same time keep the costs down for families so they can actually afford to come and be part of a quality care center.

CHILD CARE PROVIDER, LARGE DAY CARE
CENTER IN SUFFOLK COUNTY



HUDSON VALLEY

This region of New York includes the counties of Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, and Westchester. Each county's subsidy system is administered by a separate social services agency, with a separate set of applicable rules, regulations, and reimbursement rates. We visited **St. Peter's Child Care Center** in Yonkers and **The Magic Garden Child Care** in Stony Point, and we were joined by Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Sen. Shelley Mayer, and AM Andy Hevesi.

I think we need to bring it out there as something that's not really babysitting, it's education. These children are malleable, they're learning so much. It's so valuable. Every single minute of every input in their lives from zero to Kindergarten, even though it's not a public program like the K-12 education system, it should be funded equally, it should be accessible equally.

BOARD PRESIDENT, CHILD CARE COUNCIL OF WESTCHESTER

We are really losing teachers, quality people that's working here with us, to go to Walmart because then they're making \$17 an hour... We're losing people that's been working with us for 30 years or 20 years because we can't pay them...

FAMILY-BASED PROVIDER IN HUDSON VALLEY





As soon as we saw the line on the pregnancy test I was like 'alright we gotta get on every list possible because we may not get child care 10 months from now'...everyone was full, they were saying 'I'm full for almost a year out' and on top of that they had a waiting list that was off the charts so it's like, 'alright so we're just gonna cross our fingers and pray at this point.'

FATHER FROM DRYDEN, NY

We were able to find an amazing day care provider for our daughter and it has been such an amazing experience just like seeing her flourish, seeing her blossom and become this strong little person because she's able to go to this facility where she can learn every day. It's just been so rewarding to see and I just want to give a shout out to all of the day care providers who are able to fight this fight every single day for our children.

MOTHER IN CENTRAL NY



CENTRAL NEW YORK AND SOUTHERN TIER

This region of New York includes the counties of Broome, Cayuga, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego, Schuyler, Steuben, Tioga, and Tompkins. Each county's subsidy system is administered by a separate social services agency, with a separate set of applicable rules, regulations, and reimbursement rates. We visited **Tompkins Cortland Community College** in Dryden, and **The Dr. Sarah Logan Center at SUNY Upstate** in Syracuse, and were joined by Sen. May and AM Andy Hevesi, as well as staff from the office of AM Kelles.

WESTERN NEW YORK AND FINGER LAKES

This region of New York includes the counties of Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Niagara, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates. Each county's subsidy system is administered by a separate social services agency, with a separate set of applicable rules, regulations, and reimbursement rates. We visited **My Precious Angels, Our Family Daycare**, and **Little Angels Day Care** in Buffalo. We also visited **Caring & Sharing Child Care** and **Arnett's Care and Share Family Daycare** in Rochester, as well as **Minions Daycare** in Irondequoit. We were joined by Sen. Samra Brouk, Sen. Tim Kennedy, AM Monica Wallace, AM Demond Meeks, AM Harry Bronson, AM Sarah Clark, and AM Andy Hevesi.

I'm married, we have 3 kids, and we don't qualify for anything, but our child care, if we were paying out of pocket, is more than our mortgage, is more than our car insurance, more than our car notes... They had all these grants for essential workers, but because my husband's a correctional officer and was mandated a lot, we fell off because he was mandated to work so our income increased and then we no longer qualified for those grants.

MOTHER IN BUFFALO, NY



There's been challenges in child care for years. We're hearing from people that have been providers for 30 or 40 years and we're still facing the challenges that they did back then. The difference between then and now is...we're looking at a 6-12 month window till there will be a desert of daycares that have had to close. We don't have years anymore to fight this battle, the battle has to be fought now.

CENTER-BASED PROVIDER IN BUFFALO





I hold a Bachelor's Degree in ECE and with almost 20 years of experience and training, it's still hard to be taken serious as an Early Childhood Educator.

ZOOM PARTICIPANT



We talk about a child care system but I don't know what system you're talking about. We have child care... but we don't have a system. And we particularly don't have a system at the local level, and that's because we don't have the structural supports that are needed to build that system.

MEMBER OF ADIRONDACK BIRTH TO THREE ALLIANCE



CAPITAL DISTRICT, MOHAWK VALLEY & NORTH COUNTRY

This region of New York includes the counties of Albany, Clinton, Columbia, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Montgomery, Oneida, Otsego, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, St. Lawrence, Ulster, Warren, and Washington. Each county's subsidy system is administered by a separate social services agency, with a separate set of applicable rules, regulations, and reimbursement rates. We visited **Exploration Acres** in Granville, **Christina Houghtaling's Day Care** in Acra, and **Mrs. Puddle Ducks DCC** in Tannersville, and were joined by Sen. Stec (ranking minority member of the Children & Families Committee), Sen. Michelle Hinchey, AM Chris Tague, and AM Andy Hevesi. We also participated in a roundtable discussion arranged by Sen. Michelle Hinchey at Child Care Connections in Hudson, where we had a wide-ranging discussion with various administrators and stakeholders.

Start-up grants have stagnated since 2009, and information sessions for child care start-up programs have essentially stopped. There simply isn't sufficient funding. In fact, our roundtable discussion largely centered around the existence of a wide network of illegal and unregulated child care providers who provide substandard care and who exploit their workforce. Regulations, in the absence of the support needed to meet them, have not necessarily had the intended effect of improving the quality of child care, but rather pushed some providers and parents to operate outside of the legal child care system. Local officials are struggling with the issue, but it is clear they need additional financial support from the state to address it.

LABOR NIGHT

In order to get a more comprehensive landscape of the child care crisis in New York State, it was also necessary to hear from labor leaders. In addition to directly representing child care workers across the state in various modalities, they also represent parents who struggle with child care issues. We were joined by representatives from CSEA/VOICE Local 100A, the Workforce Development Institute (WDI), the Consortium for Worker Education (AFL-CIO), United University Professions (UUP), DC 37 AFSCME, the UFT, the New York Union Child Care Coalition, and PSC CUNY.

Additionally, we heard more about some key themes we had heard elsewhere. Child care providers have been struggling with low enrollment because parents are not going back to work, or are working from home, or can't afford formal child care. Group homes are facing staffing issues, and one of the newest challenges relates to the Universal Pre-K and 3-K For All initiatives, which, although they have been undeniably positive, leave many providers in a difficult position: as older children are incorporated into these initiatives, many providers are left to care only for infants and toddlers, which they cannot do profitably under the current market-based system.

I am actually a hospital worker, I have 2 young children... A lot of people, you know in my hospital, like patients are asking how we're coping with the COVID burnout. Honestly, the day care situation is what's really just dragging us down right now, even more so than COVID burnout.

MOTHER LIVING IN A DAYCARE DESERT

[Parents] need to not be wondering what the heck is going on with their child tomorrow while they're at work... We can't afford not to [address] this. Economically, we are driving away high-quality people, workers. We are driving away all this creativity that we could be having if we're not stressing about child care (and adult care.) I mean, there's so many things we're losing if we're not doing this and we can't afford not to do it.

UUP MEMBER, BUFFALO

TIME TO ACT

The demands of parents and providers for meaningful action on child care have been ignored for far too long. We saw the extraordinary damage this has caused, and we know that the industry is on the verge of collapse. New York cannot afford to continue to ignore this or to meet it with another band-aid solution.

In order to address the crisis on the scale it requires, Senator Jabari Brisport has introduced a Universal Child Care bill informed by the extensive input gathered through this tour. This bill is the first step in a process that must continue to center the perspectives of parents and child care providers across New York.

The legislative session will begin on January 5, 2022.

“ I’m preparing my first budget, this is a major priority... I plan to work with the Senator to craft a strategy that is going to be transformative, to address the needs of these families and the child care providers — *that says we don’t just talk about you, we value you, and how we value you will be shown in our budget as we put many more resources to this challenge.*

GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL

APPENDIX

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHILD CARE ADVOCACY IN THE UNITED STATES

Although there have been many efforts over the years to implement universal child care in the United States, those efforts have always been confronted by gender, race, and class-based oppression. Advocacy efforts have been both influenced and stymied by these power dynamics, and the history of these efforts provides valuable context to understanding the crisis today.

THE MOTHERS' PENSION PROGRAM (1890S–1920S)

One of the earliest efforts at child care reform in our nation's history was the Mothers' Pension Program, which emerged from the Progressive Era (1890s–1920s). This program was designed to support (some) women financially while they raised children, but the state-based payments of several dollars per month were clearly inadequate. Unlike existing calls for child care programs, this approach did not challenge the idea that white women belong in the home and it quickly gained prominence. Though less controversial than nursery schools, some conservative opponents argued vigorously against the program, saying that it would enable women to be independent of men and that it would remove one of the main incentives to get men to work (i.e., to take care of their families).

AID TO DEPENDENT CHILDREN PROGRAM (1935)

This program was effectively an expansion of the Mothers' Pension Program—intended to fund women at a sufficient level so that they could avoid taking on an extra job. It was not nearly universal and maintained the systemic racism of the Mothers' Pension Program. Poor black women were often rejected when they applied for these benefits, or were only conditionally approved. In the South, officials would do things like cut off welfare aid to Black women during cotton-picking season.

EXCLUSION FROM NEW DEAL REFORMS (1935–1939)

As advocates continued to push for a sensible child care system, they faced certain setbacks and backlash due to racial biases during the New Deal era. Industries that were predominantly composed of Black workers—including child care—were excluded from New Deal labor and wage reforms, like the National Labor Relations Act (1935) and Fair Labor Standards Act (1938).

DEFENSE PUBLIC WORKS LAW (1941)

Though there was still resistance to enabling some types of women to work outside the home, the labor shortage of World War II left the United States reliant on more women joining the labor force to sustain the war effort. The Defense Public Works law of 1941 (known as the “Lanham Act”) was initially used to build physical infrastructure like water and sewer treatment. Two years later, however, Congress used this law to allocate \$52 million (about \$800 million today) to build over 3,000 federally subsidized day care centers. The widely popular centers were open to anyone for a small fee and were not means-tested or needs-based.

DISMANTLING PUBLIC PROGRAMS (1950S–1960S)

After the war, the prevailing desire to free up jobs for returning soldiers and to resume traditional gender roles put the wartime era’s child care centers at risk. Women organized across the United States and fought to keep them open, but despite this mobilization, most were closed within a year or two (with the exception of California, where a means test was added as a condition to making them permanent).

The following years were marked by near-total legislative inaction on the issue, until Congress passed a tax deduction in 1954 to support child care for low-to-moderate earners. This, of course, only benefited those who itemized their taxes (generally wealthier people), and did nothing to address the supply, distribution, or quality of child care programs. Child care advocates continued to call for a return to a more universal program.

HEAD START (1965)

The dismantling of the child care system in the postwar years did not go unnoticed, as half of Americans living in poverty in the 1960s were children. Accordingly, President Lyndon Johnson launched the Head Start program in 1965 as a way of targeting impoverished children specifically. This program still exists today, where it is still means-tested and intended to cover families living in poverty, rather than the broader population of those who need it.

COMPREHENSIVE CHILD DEVELOPMENT (1971)

Between 1969–1971, child care, labor, and civil rights advocates organized together for universal child care and introduced the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971. Congress passed the bill with bipartisan support in both chambers, but it was [vetoed by President Nixon](#). Among his reasons, President Nixon expressed an aversion to “communal approaches to child rearing” and a belief that public child care was a threat to families.

A RETURN TO THE PATCHWORK AND THE RISE OF REAGANOMICS (1972–1990S)

In the wake of the failure to pass the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971, legislators instead reverted to making smaller shifts in the existing patchwork of programs. They offered “market-based” programs that disproportionately benefit the wealthy instead of those most in need. In 1976, for example, Congress established the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC), in part to address the fact that the preceding tax deduction only benefited those who itemize their taxes. However, the credit was not made refundable, so it still didn’t apply to the lowest-income families, and it still did nothing to address availability or quality of child care.

In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan exacerbated these problems by reducing support for low-income families while increasing tax benefits for wealthier families. This grew the for-profit child care sector somewhat, but simultaneously made child care less accessible to working-class families.

AUSTERITY IN NEW YORK AND THE PANDEMIC (2010-PRESENT)

In the state of New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo’s budgets over the past decade have maintained the austerity agenda popularized by President Ronald Reagan. Governor Cuomo pursued New York State budgets that would cut child care funding, or shift costs away from the State to the overburdened counties and local officials. Every year, the legislature needed to push back against these kinds of austerity measures. Though the child care movement continued to grow, repeated cuts to social infrastructure programs, exacerbated at the state level, gradually dragged the industry into its current state of crisis. This pre-existing crisis left the industry especially vulnerable when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, pushing it to the verge of total collapse.

As New York approaches passing its first post-Cuomo budget in the coming months, we will be doing so with a Governor who has expressed her commitment to serious financial investment in child care. While this is a moment of extraordinary crisis for the child care industry, it is also one of extraordinary potential. It is a moment in which we can finally bring to New York that which developed nations around the world have long benefited from—a stable, universal, child care system.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Supporting Families, Employers & New York's Future: An Action Plan for a Strong and Equitable Child Care System: Final Report of the Child Care Availability Task Force. Accessed December 9, 2021, <https://ocfs.ny.gov/reports/childcare/Child-Care-Availability-Task-Force-Report.pdf>
- 2 Data from Family of Woodstock Inc., presented December 1, 2021, <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/e/2PACX-1vT41Ps4affRM5rE202L7D9HWngP7c0vBTF54APq-Zi1gA5rvikF7U8VzFZlqgMgBQ/pub?start=false&loop=false&delayms=3000>