



# Early Care & Learning Council

United to Promote Quality

## **SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

### **The Child Care Crisis in New York State**

Submitted by  
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January 24, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and input on the issues before your committee today as they impact the children and families across New York State. My name is Jessica Klos Shapiro and I am the Senior Director of Policy and Community Education for the Early Care & Learning Council. The Early Care & Learning Council (ECLC) and our network of 35 Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies provide direct assistance and support to parents, child care providers, and employers in all 62 counties. The Early Care & Learning Council is also a leader within the robust Empire State Campaign for Child Care.

Child care is an infrastructure support for children, for families and for communities, and its availability is essential to a healthy economy. Without child care, there is no work, a lesson brought home during the pandemic. Federal funds, flowing through NYS Office of Children and Family Services, kept many child care programs open, but it was the CCR&R network that made sure programs accessed funds. CCR&Rs delivered PPE, COVID test kits and other health and safety supplies to programs and parents. CCR&Rs were also the pipeline for critically important information on COVID, regulations and best practices for safe operation of programs. This was in addition to what the CCR&R system has done and continues to do today through 58,000 hours of technical assistance to child providers: assisting new child care programs to open, helping programs operate safely, training the child care workforce, meeting the unique mental health care needs of babies and toddlers in child care settings, and more.

For thousands of parents, child care providers and employers throughout New York State, CCR&Rs are a key support in navigating the complex child care delivery system. In 2022 CCR&Rs, funded through OCFS, served their communities by helping more than 32,000 families find quality, affordable child care. Through the recently launched Stabilization and Deserts grants, CCR&Rs delivered grant administration to 10,604 existing child care providers and 846 prospective providers requiring help to launch their businesses. CCR&Rs are the workforce behind the workforce.

Across New York State the quality and availability of child care programs varies. ECLC recently surveyed nearly 850 child care providers that participated in the child care stabilization grant process. Many emphasized the importance of the funding itself as a lifeline, but also the crucial support of their local CCR&R throughout the process. Some feedback from the survey includes comments such as:

“If it were not for the Nassau and Suffolk childcare councils, the grants would not have been possible. Both councils provided far more than technical assistance. Both Councils provided

direct help to a director such as myself in anyway possible in a timely manner so we could financially survive.”

“I was having difficulty accessing the system and emailed for technical assistance and was immediately contacted and was assisted until the issue was resolved.”

“I couldn't have done it without help from the child care council. It was very intimidating, so they walked me thru the whole thing.”

In addition to these comments about the effectiveness of the CCR&R network were countless comments about the need for additional funding. The grants were a band-aid and child care programs are still bleeding.

We also asked our survey respondents if they believe their child care business will be open or closed in the next six months. While 824 said yes, many qualified their answers with hopes, prayers and the need within their community. Child care providers nurture and educate young children, allow parents to work outside the home, showing up day in and day out, often when it means long hours and sacrificing time with their own families, all for very low wages. Child care providers deserve better than a short term solution on a broken system.

Women of color traditionally work in infant toddler classrooms where they are paid at significantly lower wages than their white counterparts who work in three, four and five year old classrooms. This pay difference is compounded by the low-wage that child care workers earn across the board. Long-term supports to increase wages for our children’s teachers are critical. Like child care staff and educators themselves, the overwhelming majority of CCR&R staff are female. In order to reach real pay equality, the specialized and necessary work of the CCR&R agencies must be compensated. This increase cannot be resolved through short term investments, but rather with continued support for multiple funding streams and partners.

At a time when access to affordable, quality child care is profoundly restricted for working families, CCR&Rs are an integral part of how communities support quality child care systems. OCFS contracts that support these services were cut in 2012 and have remained flat ever since—diminishing the breadth and strength of the services delivered by the CCR&Rs to their communities. Funding levels have failed to keep up with the cost of the services CCR&Rs provide, triggering an inability to compete for essential staff, including Parent Counselors, Provider Education Specialists, Infant Toddler Specialists, Mental Health Consultants, Referral Specialists and other skilled professionals needed to effectively support and grow child care programs.

To preserve the essential services CCR&Rs offer to working parents, and expand to meet the need of the expanding child care sector, ECLC and the network of CCR&Rs respectfully request the Governor and Legislature support the following increases vital to the economic development of parents, families, providers and employers across NY State:

Increase Child Care Resource & Referral Contracts (including Registration contracts: \$7.9 million to cover increasing costs to staff the network of 35 CCR&Rs and ECLC who train over 17,000 child care providers serving 400,000 children in NYS. Since 2012, when contracts were last adjusted, inflation has risen at a rate of 29.7%.<sup>i</sup>

Maintain and Integrate TA positions: \$6.5 million annually: CCR&R staff have served as technical assistance (TA) specialists to ensure that child care providers access and utilize stabilization and desert grants available through federal relief funding. This funding will sunset in the next year. Most child care providers started without the infrastructure to successfully apply for and implement these grants—yet the funding and associated business training has been essential to their survival. These positions are essential to the on-going survival of child care businesses throughout our state. Without a widespread adoption of stronger business strategies, providers are at risk of financial instability and closing their doors, contributing to an even greater shortage of child care in NY State. 64% of New York State is a child care desert, one of the highest rates in the nation. Without the TA specialists working closely with new and existing child care providers, this situation will only deteriorate, undercutting parents' ability to work and undermining the state's economic future.

Mental Health Services: \$4 million annually: ECLC and the network launched an Infant Toddler Mental Health Consultation (ITMHC) project in 2019. 35 ITMHCs served over 2,000 vulnerable children in 2022. ECLC requests funding to increase services to child care providers and children to ensure that our youngest children get off to the start that they deserve with nurturing and responsive child care settings, prompt identification of developmental and behavioral challenges, and timely referrals and receipt of additional services.

- o To begin to bring this service to scale, additional Mental Health Consultants need to be hired by the CCR&Rs to across all regions of the state. This increase also includes 12 ITMHCs for NYC. 51% of all children 0-5 in New York State live in NYC.

- o To expand to underserved communities impacted by the lingering effects of COVID-19

o To ensure mental health professionals work in collaboration with educators to ensure that trauma informed practices are being utilized in classrooms and that appropriate social emotional strategies are implemented through a trauma informed and racial equity lenses.

Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) trainers: \$5.5 million annually: To mitigate and address racism and unconscious bias in the early care and learning system, ECLC is looking to expand the training for CCR&Rs and child care providers to create an equitable child care system. By ensuring that a culturally responsive early care and education is available to all children and families, we can work to reduce the discrimination that is present system-wide:

ECLC proposes to hire and train a DEIB specialist at each of the 35 CCR&Rs. These specialists will work in collaboration with ITMHCs to implement strategies and combat unconscious bias to decrease the number of black brown boys that are suspended from child care programs. The DEIB specialists will be responsible for the development and implementation of anti-racist curriculum, training for staff, work with providers and OCFS licensors.

By strengthening the CCR&R system, the economic development of parents, families, providers and employers across New York State will also be bolstered.

The child care industry has been tough on providers and for families, but it doesn't have to be this way. We need to dismantle the broken system carried on the backs of the parents paying for care or the underpaid educators that are providing the care. For too long we simply accepted the system inequities and made do. Progress has been made in the past few years and we need to build on that momentum with the proposals the Governor put forth in the State of the State and the great legislation being championed by Senators such as Chairman Brisport. Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments to you. The Early Care & Learning Council and our CCR&R network look forward to continuing to effectively serve the families and communities of New York State.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>