

**Written Testimony By ECE On The Move before the
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

The Child Care Crisis in New York State

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On behalf of Gladys Jones, Founder of ECE On The Move, we thank Chair Jabari Brisport and members of the Senate Standing Committee on Children and Families for the opportunity to offer testimony on the state of the child care crisis from the perspective of Early Care Educators in Residential Settings based in NYC. ECE On The Move is a grassroots organization advocating for Early Care and Education Professionals historically known as Family Child Care Providers. We are Providers representing Providers and Families. We are one sector of the child care workforce, serving over 600 caregivers who are licensed, informal, directly contracted with the DOE, affiliated with Networks or struggling to survive as an independent yet quality-care -offering provider. Our mission is to uplift our modality as a profession, a viable choice of child care and to break all of the inequities that have us bound as the poorest choice of child care. As a member organization of Empire State Campaign for Child Care, it is important to us that families have choices for quality and readily-accessible and available child care

and that the educators are compensated progressive wages that compliment the quality of care which they are offering.

Our movement is dedicated to empowering Early Care Educators and families with the tools needed to advocate for themselves, document their issues on pay, disparity, oppression and to speak upon their needs as they arise. According to each Grievance which we continue to receive on a regular daily basis, the child care system is broken in NY. It continues it's design to keep black and brown women poor and oppressed whether they are caring for children or in need of services.

Systemic Issues

1. Impact of the Lack of Investment for Family Child Care Providers

- a. Workforce Compensation is absolutely nowhere near the mark of where it should be. An undervalued, underpaid and under-resourced provider will yield undervalued children and it would be looked at as the fault of the provider herself. NYS, we have to move into a payment system that reimburses for the actual cost of child care.
- b. There will continue to be closures of programs when underfunding is in place. Providers are choosing to work in other care sectors that don't pay well, driving taxis and working anywhere just to get minimum wages with the idea that working anywhere for low pay beats being a provider forgoing her own pay and to barely pay assistants let alone the rent. There is historical focus on increasing slots for families and leaving out improved compensation for caregivers. What good is this if Providers doors are closing rapidly? Who will care for the children? We must build a sustainable system for providers as the foundation for an expansion that will provide real benefit to parents and children. That takes immediate investment to boost payment rates that cover the true cost of care that includes living wages for providers.
- c. Federally funded stabilization grants have helped providers survive and keep their doors open, and the Governor is proposing workforce

retention grants that are designed to support caregivers with those funds, but that isn't sustainable – federal Stabilization funds must be exhausted by September of this year. Where is the revenue plan to make those or other funding for child care providers – adequate and sustainable?

- d. Going forward – OCFS, ACS and the DOE MUST make reimbursement rates automatically accessible to caregivers without tedious and time-consuming bureaucratic paperwork designed to keep caregivers away from the pay rates which they ALL advocated for with their district legislators. ECEOTM had to advocate to each of these agencies so that providers had easier access to improved rates unlike so many previous years before.
 - e. Network-Affiliated Providers are the clearest examples of Providers who are offering “DOE STANDARD” care and yet continue to receive pay equal to those who are not affiliated. Where is the benefit to being affiliated? Providers want access to resources that the DOE can offer families, but if you are going to herd providers into the latest initiative and treat them as worker with policies of when to open and how to operate as you would an employee, then by definition with the Department of Labor, they are employees. Therefore, where is their salary, where are the pensions and health insurances? Why did the DOE not make the market rate reimbursements automatic for this valuable workforce?
 - f. Currently, Network-Affiliated Providers are the Providers who obtain the resources they need to offer quality care while Providers who choose to not affiliate are left under-resourced and creates an environment of separation of the modality; identifying the haves and the have nots of caregivers.
- 2. Lack of Availability of Child Care**
- a. Parents are still on the waiting list – or so they believe. ECEOTM continues to receive grievance reports from families who have ZERO ideas where they stand on the waiting list. Zero contact from ACS or HRA.
 - b. During the pandemic, subsidy payments were streamlined. Parents were approved within a day or two. Providers and parents received

notification immediately via email. Providers were even paid on a weekly basis.

- c. There is no smooth process by which a family may see a DOE banner advertising on the home of a Network-Affiliated FCC Provider in her community and decide that she would love to take her children there for care. This is where the ease of availability and accessibility end for both the family and the Provider. From there, depending on the Network an unnecessary waitlisting begins. The control of enrollment is out of the hands of the caregiver in her own program.
- d. We want to be assured that the children of undocumented families who live in our neighborhoods are assisted with opportunities for quality child care. These very children live in our neighborhoods, in our buildings, everywhere throughout NYC and NYS. FCC Providers will not participate in the unconstitutional segregation of children preventing them from learning opportunities that are afforded to others.

3. Poor Supports to Families in Need of Child Care

- a. A Bridge is needed to support families receiving subsidies going from HRA to ACS and connecting families and their child care providers. Presumptive eligibility or something in place to give parents time to get recertification paperwork together while keeping children in attendance and keeping providers' slots filled would be helpful. Providers do not always receive eligibility paperwork from HRA or ACS. 24-month eligibility status could help ease this burden on a family when recertification issues come up provided their work or school situation have not changed. Currently, when a family loses their spot due to slow re-certification, they may lose their child care spot altogether because providers have to keep up with enrollment.
- b. An improvement is needed with the ACS Hotline. Currently, the calls are handled by people who do not have all of the information of the caller in order to assist. This generates callbacks which are not respectfully handled or no callbacks at all. A customer service approach is heavily needed.

4. Point people needed in every agency – DOHMH, DOE, HRA

- a. which works with caregivers and families to respond to Grievances in particular and to provide a process by which they may advocate for themselves by following set protocols. None of the mentioned agencies has a point person designated to help a provider or family with issues pertaining to specifically, intentionally and speedily addressing a child care voucher issue or any grievance presented by a provider or parent. A point person would be charged with an immediate (same day) reach-out to a provider or parent regarding any grievances and a plan in place to resolve it – in a respectable manner.
 - i. HRA – We have grievances from families waiting for responses from HRA. They have disappeared from the lives of families who need child care – as we know it.
 - ii. DOHMH – continue to have their doors closed to Providers. Providers must make appointment to be seen. This was not the case pre-pandemic. Providers’ licences are on the line each day that a licensor or registrar is not in contact with them. Paperwork constantly need approval and licensors are poorly responsive. The backlog is serious and jeopardizes the licenses’ state of compliance.
 - iii. DOE - There is absolutely no point person to handle grievances for providers who are affiliated with Networks contracted with the DOE since the dismantle of many in the DECE administration.
 - iv. To be clear – point people to assist families and Providers in these agencies are necessary But **WE ARE CALLING ON THE NEED FOR HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS IN THESE AGENCIES TO RESPOND TO SERIOUS GRIEVANCES AND TO PROVIDE OVERSIGHT THAT THE ISSUES ARE BEING APPROPRIATELY RESPONDED TO.**

These are our major issues to present today. We have grievance forms to support all of our claims. We do encourage all of the agencies here today to work with us and other stakeholders who are testifying today to improve our child care system.

The voices of parents and providers are needed for our own survival. When we set forth initiatives and legislation to ensure that Providers are THRIVING – we are ensuring that it is children who are thriving. Again, thank you from ECE On The Move.