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**JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING FEBRUARY 8, 2023**

**TESTIMONY**

Chair Benedetto and members of the legislature, thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Ashara Baker and I'm a proud charter parent to a first grader in Rochester. I have been a community organizer in Rochester for 13 years and I am proud to be the New York State Director at the National Parents Union and co-founder of the New York State Charter Parent Council. I have had the privilege of meeting, training, and supporting families across the state, families from all backgrounds and walks of life who express similar concerns about their children.

Curious to know what is keeping some of these families up at night?

I have listened to a mother say she feels helpless watching her child fall behind and now has to struggle with paying for outside tutoring. I have spoken to family groups who don't know what ESSER funds are and how their school has spent them, now questioning transparency. I have also seen a family take matters into their own hands and spend thousands of dollars to have their child privately assessed for dyslexia due to their school not offering screening. I have seen parents struggle to find the best option for their child to thrive and I have heard from parents who are terrified that their child will not be prepared for college or career after graduating from high school.

These families all make a conscious effort to do right by their children. I'm asking you today to do the same for all children and families. The New York State public education system is in dire need of changes to ensure that New York students are prepared for a life of opportunity. Families need lawmakers like yourselves to step up and meet this moment, because the truth is the consequences of inaction are too great- our kids' futures are on the line.

This session there are some real actions that would have an immediate impact on the lives of kids and families across New York. Every child deserves a life of opportunity that is a result of a high quality education. We believe that building robust career pathways programs to prepare kids for their future, supporting the science of teaching math and literacy, investing in learning acceleration initiatives like high impact tutoring and ensuring that all kids across the state have access to high quality, funded education choices. When I say every child, I mean every child.

I live in a district that is subject to two state monitors, continues to see a revolving door of superintendents, and has great disparity in district programs. I made my choice to enroll my daughter in a charter school because we couldn't afford to let operational dysfunction impact her trajectory in life. She, like all children, deserves a fair shot,

especially being a so-called pandemic baby. We are fortunate enough that my daughter has found a home for learning with Genesee Community Charter School. Her school is ranked top among local charter schools, outperforms home district programs, and scores competitively on statewide assessments. This school continues to amaze me with their ability to get high academic results with an unequal share of per pupil funding. I applaud the outcomes but will not celebrate until charter schools like this one receive fair funding like their district schools. All children deserve equity and fairness, now more than ever.

My daughter's charter community is small, but rich in offering expeditionary learning, rigorous curriculum, and a nurturing community. This community is forever evolving based off of their approach to listening to parents and partnering with the community. They work even harder to connect the students they serve to the community and ultimately are limited due to funding. We know all children need mental health services and increases in tutoring. But we also know charter's don't receive access to public education programs that districts participate in. Let's include charter students in the \$250 Million allocated for high-impact tutoring like their district peers. No child or household is better than the other. These kids deserve the same resources.

As my daughter grows up, I care about her having a throughline to college or career. While our state celebrates opportunities for funding around workforce development, we must invest in career education programs that will support this pipeline. Expanding the opportunity to all High School Students, 9th-12th grade, through dedicated career counseling, an expansion of dual enrollment programming, and work based learning opportunities. There should be a direct connection between the programs and high wage, high skill, and high demand employment.

New York ranks 46th out of 50 states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), reporting 4th grade math tests with an average scale score of 227. NY 4th graders are two grade levels behind their peers in Massachusetts (242). It is imperative that we see a mathematics improvement initiative funded this year that will support math instruction and achievement. We need more focus on aligned academics, assessments, and interventions as well as professional learning and a math coaching system.

We need to see support for the science of teaching and learning how to read- without having the ability to read, you do not have the power to advance your life or serve our community. Literacy is a civil right. Some families will overcome the barrier and find a costly program that gets their child the reading and writing support they need. But many families in disadvantaged communities will be written off and added to the decades of students the system failed. From my community, black and brown families face this impact generations later. You'll find more adults who can't fill out job applications, struggle to read health forms, and will be more prone to being criminalized. It is time to invest in policies and programs that focus on evidence based learning, research on interventions, and assessments for all learners.

Every option should be a great option where a student is guaranteed the ability to read and do math AND parents want choice within public education! They deserve to send their children to safe, supportive, and results driven learning environments. Public charter schools serve as a way for families to get a shot at a quality education and in a recent poll, 65% of NY parents support the school model as an option.

So I implore you to hold on to this message that parents want what's best for their children and are informed enough to make decisions for themselves.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.