Empire State
CAMPAIGN FOR CHILD CARE

Testimony of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Eric Dinowitz, Chair and The Subcommittee on
Early Childhood Education, Honorable Jennifer Gutierrez, Chair
Oversight: The Path to Universal Child Care

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Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and Chair Gutierrez, and members of the Committee on Education and the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education, for the opportunity to testify.

The Empire State Campaign for Child Care (ESCCC) is a statewide coalition of parents, educators, and advocates who believe that every family in New York State deserves high quality, universal child care, and that every child care educator deserves to earn a thriving wage. The campaign was founded in 2017 and advocates at the state and federal level for investment in child care that best serves the needs of New York's families and child care educators. Many of the organizational and individual leaders and members of our campaign are New York City residents.

In November 2025, the ESCCC released a comprehensive plan for achieving our goal of statewide universal child care, including rollout principals to achieving that goal in a manner that prioritizes the lowest income New York families, and avoids unintended consequences, like destabilizing the home-based child care sector or reducing the number of infant and toddler seats. A December 2025 sign-on letter to Governor Hochul—from more than 140 organizations representing New York parents, child care providers, child and family advocates, and business leaders from every corner of the state—indicates the widespread support for this vision in New York City and around the state.

We were thrilled to stand with New York Governor Hochul and Mayor Mamdani in early January —on the Mayor's eighth day in office—when Governor Hochul proposed the state's single largest investment in child care and pre-K in state history, and framed these investments as steps toward achieving statewide universal child care. This is a defining, consequential moment for New York State child care. If City, State, local and community leaders work together to invest boldly, and choose the rollout path thoughtfully, we could truly transform child care— and the lives of families in New York—for generations. We urge you to act directly at the city level—and indirectly by calling for action at the state level—to ensure the rollout to universal child care is equitable, prioritizes low-income and marginalized communities, and increases compensation and supports for the early childhood education workforce beginning this year.

As you negotiate the New York City Budget, work with the Mayor to develop an implementation plan for expanding 3-K and implementing 2-K, and continue to monitor—and we hope, weigh in on—New York State budget negotiations, we urge you to consider the following recommendations.

Top Urgent Universal Child Care Recommendations for the New York City Council for 2026

- **New York City leaders should join the child care community and state lawmakers calling for the 2026-2027 New York State Budget to implement a child care workforce compensation fund to provide ongoing and reliable compensation supplements to all members of the child care workforce until New York has achieved statewide universal child care that pays providers adequate rates to pay the workforce a thriving wage ($1.2 billion).** Neither New York State nor New York City can achieve universal child care without recruiting and retaining far more professionals in the field, which is not possible without a significant, sustained, compensation hike.
- **New York City leaders should urge New York State leaders to adopt the Governor's proposed $1.2 billion in new investment in the Child Care Assistance program and add the funding necessary to meet demand for CCAP /vouchers in New York City as the City and State move toward statewide universal child care.**
    - New York City leaders must ensure that New York City meets any matching requirements to draw down all CCAP funds.
    - New York City must act without delay to ensure that no early childhood seats are left empty while children from low-income families are languishing on the voucher waitlist.
    - ***If CCAP/voucher enrollment closures and waitlists are allowed to persist, the success of New York State and New York City's plans to expand pre-K, 3-K and 2-K will be undermined—and could result in the exclusion of low-income families. Pre-K expansions alone will not ensure low-income parents can work and achieve economic stability because without CCAP, many families will be unable to afford child care for younger children and/or for before and afterschool care for their pre-K, 3-K, 2-K and school-aged children. As the state expands universal child care, the CCAP program can be scaled down.***
- Adopt the Governor's proposal to invest $73 million to launch 2-K in New York City focusing initially on high-need areas, and ensure that 2-K is implemented in a manner that guards against the loss of (already scarce) infant and toddler seats, with flexibility to adjust the model to a multi-age, community care or other model if these issues arise. Further, it is essential that all modalities of child care—including center and home-based child care providers—are able to fully participate in 2-K.

How New York State and New York City Implements Universal Child Care Matters: Background

Low-income families must be prioritized, along with the workforce—which is among the lowest paid occupations in the state. Further, the rollout must be structured to avoid unintended consequences like increased tuition for middle-income families, a loss of already scarce infant and toddler capacity, or the destabilization of community-based and family child care programs by pulling older children, who cost less to care for, into school-based settings.

An Equitable Rollout of Universal Child Care and Pre-K and 3-K Expansion Must Include the Following Investment and Actions:

- **Immediate and sustained increase in workforce compensation through a state-funded workforce compensation fund.** For so long as child care remains a public-private market, with most families paying tuition on their own, the only way to raise the wages of the child care workforce without raising private-pay tuition is by paying state-funded workforce supplements until the state has made the transition to a truly universal system, paying rates that support a thriving workforce wage. Compensation supplements will also guard against an exodus of child care educators from community-based organizations to school based pre-K programs, which has been the case in other periods of pre-K expansion.

  The 2026-2027 New York State Executive Budget allocates **no funds** for the child care workforce. If no funding is added before the budget is finalized, this will be the second year in a row since the pandemic that there are no funds for the child care workforce. In 2023, one-time retention bonuses were awarded to child care educators: $3,000 full time; $2,300 afterschool. In 2024, bonuses of $2,250 for full time educators; $1,725 for afterschool.

- **Fully meet demand for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) as we build toward universal child care.** CCAP (also referred to as vouchers) currently helps the families of approximately 168,000 low-income children around New York State afford child care, with about 110,000 of those children residing in New York City. For those families able to access CCAP, this assistance can be life changing. They can see their annual child care bill for one infant in home-based child care drop from $16,000 to $500. Unfortunately, notwithstanding a surge in state funding into the CCAP program in recent years, demand still far outpaces funding. To manage this shortfall, as of January 2026, 34 counties and NYC have closed enrollment or started waitlists, leaving thousands of eligible families across the state scrambling to patch together care for their children, with some having to reduce their work hours, or leave the workforce altogether. In New York City, the CCAP/voucher waitlist currently includes more than 16,000 children. Notably, more than 20,000 pre-K and extended day, extended year pre-K seats went unfilled in fiscal year 2025. The State Executive Budget proposes $1.2B in new, recurring funding for CCAP—the largest increase to CCAP in New York State history. Unfortunately, even this historic level of investment is unlikely to permanently end waitlists and closures—particularly in New York City given the size of the waitlist. It is not clear yet what percentage of these new funds would be directed to New York City, but currently, New York City receives about 61% of the state's annual CCAP allocations. Of note: the Executive Budget proposes that $475 million of the new CCAP funding be earmarked for New York City contingent upon New York City matching those funds. The Administration for Children's Services estimates the funding need for New

York City CCAP to be $1.2 billion, but that would only keep the voucher caseload at close to its current level; the waitlist would persist.

- **Also of concern: the voucher waitlist is playing a role in keeping compensation for child care educators low, particularly those working in home-based settings.** A November 2025 report by the New School's Center for New York City Affairs, *Dignified Pay for Quality Care*, demonstrates the extent to which under-enrollment in New York City home-based programs contributes to low-pay. The found that home-based provider average hourly wages in 2023 were $7.33 for Family Child Care and $5.98 per hour for Group Family Child Care, their hourly wage increased threefold if they had full, or close to full enrollment, to $18.84 and $17.62, respectively. However, only 29 percent of the FCC providers and 51 percent of GFCC providers surveyed had "good enrollment" in 2023. Across the state, licensed home-based providers serve 38% of families receiving CCAP/vouchers, leaving this modality of care particularly vulnerable to the impacts of low-enrollment because families are languishing on a CCAP/voucher waitlist.

- **Expand pre-K and 3-K in coordination with full funding of CCAP.**
- **Prioritize communities with high rates of low-income families with young children** for universal projects and pre-K expansions.

Other Core Principles

- **Middle-income families must be protected from rate hikes, benefits cliffs, and shifting supply as we scale up to universal child care**. Creating a state-funded child care workforce compensation fund allows for workforce wages to be increased without raising tuition for middle class families not yet able to access universal care. A capped-fee universal program for middle income families that is targeted to serve families just over the CCAP eligibility limit would be an approach that would address one of the sharpest benefits cliffs facing families who make just over the CCAP income limit.

- **Universal child care must be understood to include afterschool care, summer care, and evening and weekend care for children 0 to 13, and be inclusive of children with disabilities, and regardless of immigration status.** Families' need for child care extends beyond weekdays 9 to 5 (or 9-3 in the case of many pre-K programs), and long after a child enters pre-K or Kindergarten.

- **Infant and toddler seats must be preserved in pre-K and universal child care rollouts.** Rates to care for babies and toddlers are the highest because caring for very young children (appropriately) requires the most hands-on attention; as a result, these are already the hardest seats to find. Any rollout plan must be sure not to incentivize programs to switch scarce infant and toddler seats to care for older children.

- **All settings must be supported in pre-K and universal child care expansions** to ensure families have the freedom to choose the care setting that best meets their needs—home, center, and school-based.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We are happy to answer any questions and can be reached at shershkowitz@empirestatechildcare.org and dhill@scaany.org.