



*The final budget includes historic investments in child care, but does not lay a fully sound and equitable foundation for universal child care*

The final 2026-2027 New York State budget represents monumental progress toward our vision of universal child care with its record, recurring investments in child care assistance for low- and moderate-income families, and its significant pre-K and 3-K expansions. It also includes funding for the state's first-ever universal child care pilot projects outside of New York City, and 2-K in New York City. Unfortunately, the budget also makes a jarring misstep in failing to include any funding for workforce compensation or adequate funding to end the child care assistance waitlists around the state.

For nearly a decade, the Empire State Campaign for Child Care has been tirelessly advocating for a path to universal child care in New York State - a path that prioritizes low-income families and recognizes that justly compensating the child care workforce is essential to success. Our coalition of families, early childhood educators, and policy advocates have called for robust investment in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), an ongoing compensation increase for the child care workforce, and bridge programs to expand universal child care in communities across the state. We are pleased the final budget includes many of the ESCCC's top priorities, including robust additional funding for the Child Care Assistance Program as the state builds toward universal child care, and the launch of universal mixed-age child care pilots.

To successfully achieve universal child care and pre-K, those systems must be built on a strong and inclusive foundation. This budget leaves too many New Yorkers behind and without the resources they urgently need. Without sufficient funds in the final budget for child care assistance, low-income working families will continue to languish on the child care assistance waitlist in New York City - 25,000 children and growing each month. Without any funding for compensation for the child care workforce in the final budget, it will not be possible to recruit and retain enough early childhood educators to meet the demand of a universal child care system.

In a time where families across the state are struggling to make ends meet and elected officials are focusing on affordability, this budget falls short on delivering for those who are in the greatest need. This includes the thousands of families across the state who cannot access the child care assistance that they qualify for. It includes early childhood educators, some of the lowest paid workers in the state and who are predominantly women of color. A well-compensated workforce is non-negotiable to the success of universal child care. Prioritizing low-income families is non-negotiable to an equitable roll-out of universal child care.

Our campaign will continue to fight for the needs of children, families, and early childhood educators, and for the achievement of our vision of universal child care. In the near future, we will be working to ensure the success of the three universal pilot projects in Broome, Monroe, and Dutchess Counties. Successful pilots must be truly universal - without means testing, immigration status, or activities' testing - and must pay the workforce a just wage.

"Despite historic funding for child care, this budget does not deliver the relief that many families and providers need. Universal child care cannot be delivered without recruiting and retaining a well compensated early childhood workforce. Families cannot thrive as long as there are Child Care Assistance Program waitlists across the state. Our campaign will continue to fight for those New Yorkers with the greatest needs," **said Shoshana Hershkowitz, Campaign Manager for the Empire State Campaign for Child Care.**

"CHCF joins our advocacy partners in expressing our deep disappointment with the state for disregarding, yet again, the childcare workforce. We recognize the historic commitments made to universal childcare; however, these systems will be built on the backs of the childcare workforce – made up overwhelmingly by women of color and immigrants – who remain one of the lowest paid sectors in the state. While the state's goal is universal child care, we are still functioning in a very broken and unstable system. We thank the state for the \$1.2 billion increase to CCAP, but unfortunately this will not be enough to fully address the care crisis as families continue to face significant waitlists across the state, and programs continue to close their doors."

"It is critical that the state works to maximize the reach of existing funds, but without the increase in funding, thousands of children will continue to be held out from out-of-school-time programs that uplift their academic and personal growth in safe care spaces. CHCF knows that New York can do better, and we remain committed to advocating for the comprehensive needs of our communities, in partnership with our state

representatives," said **Ramon Peguero, Esq., President & CEO, Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF).**

"The final 2026–2027 New York State budget represents meaningful progress toward building a universal child care system, particularly through increased investments in the Child Care Assistance Program, pre-K expansion, and the launch of universal child care pilot projects outside of New York City. However, this budget still falls short of creating the equitable and sustainable foundation needed to truly achieve universal child care in New York State. Without adequate funding to eliminate child care assistance waitlists and without permanent investments in workforce compensation, we risk expanding a system that cannot sustain the educators and providers responsible for making it function every day."

"As a home-based child care provider and advocate, I see firsthand how families across our communities continue to struggle to access affordable, high-quality care, while providers struggle to retain qualified staff amid rising operational costs and insufficient compensation. The child care workforce — made up primarily of women and women of color — deserves investment, stability, and wages that reflect the critical role they play in children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Additionally, home-based child care programs must continue to be included as equal partners in the state's vision for universal child care. We must continue pushing for a system that is accessible, equitable, and sustainable for all," said **Janna Rodriguez, Founder & Owner, The Innovative Daycare Corp. and The Innovative Daycare II Corp.**

"By her own admission, New York's 'first mom governor' understands that building a universal child care system requires a strong foundation: thriving, competitive wages for the workforce, and enough resources to help families access care without long waitlists. There are already more than 20,000 children on waitlists for care. The enacted budget falls short of what families were promised, and as a result, the path to truly universal child care in New York remains long," said **Marina Marcou-O'Malley, Co Executive Director of the Alliance for Quality Education.**

"Afterschool is school-age child care and, without it, "universal" is not truly that. Expanding PreK will simply not work if parents do not have coverage for their three- and four-year-olds when the school day ends. We hope that implementation will include the full continuum of services families need," said **Jenn O'Connor, Policy Consultant and ESCCC Steering Committee Member, New York State Network for Youth Success.**

*The [Empire State Campaign for Child Care](#) is a statewide coalition of parents, child care 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 levels for investment in child care that best serves the needs of all of New York's families and child care educators.*

*Read ESCCC's Report: [New York State Child Care for All - The Plan to Achieve It](#)*