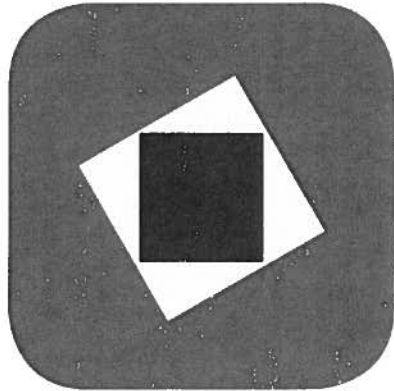


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early care &
Learning COUNCIL

New York's child care resource network

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing on
2013-2014 Executive Budget Proposal:
Human Services**

Submitted by
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and input on Governor Cuomo's proposed budget for New York State. The Early Care & Learning Council is a statewide, not-for-profit organization, whose mission is to promote excellence in early care and education with equal access for all families. We do this primarily through the support of, and in partnership with, a strong network of 35 community-based organizations that provide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services. The Early Care & Learning Council is also a member of *Winning Beginning NY*, the State's early care and development coalition.

Child Care Resource and Referral agencies have the capacity to bring child care information and support to the work place and to assist directly with employers. Parents can utilize our comprehensive services so they quickly obtain reliable child care that meets their needs and the requirements of their employers. We know where regulated child care exists and where additional capacity has to be developed to support emerging or growing businesses or respond to changes in employer needs. Child care is an infrastructure support for children, for families and for communities.

To thousands of parents, child care providers and employers throughout New York State, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) are the key to the child care service system. They help families make informed decisions about child care, recruit new providers, offer ongoing professional development and offer supports to the community. Whether it be through training, teen mother mentoring, resource libraries, conferences, advisory supports or one of any of the other hundreds of support they provide, these agencies, and their funding play a vital role in their communities.

If the early care and education sector were not supported, there would be many parents who could not work each day, as well as employers unable to operate or expand their businesses. Reliable, regulated, quality child care increases employee attendance, punctuality and productivity. In fact 63% of the employees surveyed by American Business Collaboration reported improved productivity associated with quality dependent care.

The release of the 2012 CCR&R Funding RFP contained a decrease of nearly \$850,000 despite the fact that the line item in the State budget remained the same at \$22.03 million. Prior to the cut State funding for Child Care Resource & Referral agencies had remained flat for over ten

years while service costs have been steadily rising. CCR&Rs have incurred many of the additional costs associated with supporting the child care field.

Overall this reduction represents a five percent cut to programs statewide. These funds must be restored. A lack of New York State investment in this early childhood infrastructure will result in a loss of services for children and families. Child care is an economic development tool and CCR&Rs are the agencies that connect families to child care. CCR&Rs are also the agencies that connect communities to quality early learning. While agencies have reduced staff and increased caseloads, these are only temporary solutions. If left underfunded services may be lost or passed on to local government to help families if state funding is not restored.

Additionally, today, counties are reducing eligibility levels for child care subsidies, increasing parent copayments and closing intake altogether, therefore creating long waiting lists. Child care can account for up to 50% of the family budget, outpacing even rent or mortgage. New York State continues to fall short in meeting the need for financial assistance with child care, with tens of thousands of income-eligible families on the waiting list for subsidies. New York needs to create a subsidy system that bases parent co-payments on their ability to pay and ensures equitable eligibility rules across the state. The child care subsidy allocation formula must also be examined to meet the needs of families struggling to work and pay for child care now by beginning to serve more children and building a quality, stable system of care.

We ask that New York State make an investment to bring us back to the 2010-11 level of \$999 million in child care fund to meet the needs of families struggling to work and pay for child care by beginning to serve more children and building a quality, stable system of care. In 2012-2013 state funds were used to supplant lost federal funds. Those state funds have diminished this year in the presence of federal funds, despite the overwhelming need for increased services. Parents need affordable care that supports their ability to work and children need care to nurture their development.

Research tells us that the foundation for success in school and in life is developed well before a child enters kindergarten. In fact, a child's earliest experiences are responsible for wiring the brain for future use. Long term educational achievement is uniformly linked to participation in high quality early care and education. In the long-run, high quality early childhood programs are self-financing; in the short-run, a significant portion of program costs are offset by savings in remedial programs.

Children who have spent time in high quality child care environments have lasting benefits from the experience. Nobel Laureate Economist James Heckman asserts, "Smart, high quality, and targeted early childhood development promotes health, economic, and social outcomes by fusing cognitive skills with the critical social skills of attentiveness, persistence, and sociability."ⁱ

Research by the American Academy of Pediatrics tells us that children who attend high-quality early childhood programs demonstrate better math and language skills, better cognition and social skills, better interpersonal relationships, and better behavioral self-regulation than do children in lower-quality care. Children exposed to a poor-quality environment are less likely to be prepared for school demands and more likely to have their socio-emotional development derailed.

This why we applaud the expansion of pre-kindergarten in high needs school districts time from 2.5 hours to 5 hours and are hopeful that this will provide thousands of 4 year olds with a good pre-k experience. We know New York's child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) will be working hard through the transition to help families identify wrap around care that is accessible and affordable. Our network of CCR&Rs will also be particularly interested in how this change affects the children and families in the 60% of Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) programs operating in community based programs like Head Start and child care centers. Currently there is requirement that at least 10% of funding to be invested in community programs and we would like to see this maintained. Furthermore, a mechanism is still needed to align standards and guidelines in order to assure that programs are indeed quality. QUALITYstarsNY is our quality rating and improvement system that is designed to increase quality in early learning settings – including community based organizations and schools - throughout the state.

QUALITYstarsNY is a five star rating and improvement system that can help programs meet the standards we all expect in our early childhood programs. The New York State Education Department (SED) has already invested \$4 million in Race to the Top funds in QUALITYstarsNY that provides a cogent and tested framework for ensuring quality and improving school success in Pre-K and other early childhood programs for children birth to five.

High quality early learning experiences in the first five years are crucial to shaping the development of executive function skills, skills necessary today and in the future.

“Being able to focus, hold, and work with information in mind, filter distractions, and switch gears is like having an air traffic control system at a busy airport to manage the arrivals and departures of dozens of planes on multiple runways. In the brain, this air traffic control mechanism is called executive functioning, a group of skills that helps us to focus. Acquiring the early building blocks of these skills is one of the most important and challenging tasks of the early childhood years, and the opportunity to build further on these rudimentary capacities is critical to healthy development through middle childhood, adolescence, and into early adult life.”ⁱⁱⁱ

QUALITYstarsNY is designed to acknowledge programs that demonstrate quality above and beyond meeting New York State's strong regulatory standards and develop a plan for improvement for all participating programs to reach the highest standards. While New York has developed QUALITYstarsNY, the program has not been implemented statewide due to the lack of state funding.

An investment of at least \$5 million is necessary to begin any form of statewide implementation of QUALITYstarsNY. These funds would be invested in quality assessment, monitoring and administration, professional development, technical assistance, financial incentives, public awareness, system evaluation, and data system development. A steady commitment of future state dollars will be necessary to fully phase in QUALITYstarsNY statewide. This cost burden, as well as benefits, can be shared by multiple state agencies that are influential to the lives of our youngest citizens-our future workforce. Full statewide implementation of all of QUALITYstarsNY's components would be phased in over several years, requiring a total state

investment that would break down to approximately \$300 per child. The system covers the full spectrum of state licensed or regulated early care and education programs and services. Focus is on children ages 0-5, but standards for school-age child care have been developed.

Significant work has been done to create QUALITYstarsNY, but the State must invest in its full implementation in order to make the resource available to families, as well as the children that need it to ensure a solid foundation that will prepare them for the future.

As the New York State government plans for the future, I hope it will think about including plans to support the development of a quality child care system that will create both short term and long term success for our youngest learners and their families. During this budget cycle we urge you to:

- Restore funding for Child Care Resource and Referral services
- Invest in QUALITYstarsNY
- Increase funding for Child Care Subsidies

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments to you.

ⁱ Heckman, J., 2009. "Stimulating the Young" The American. The Online Magazine of American Enterprise Institute.

ⁱⁱ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2011). *Building the Brain's "Air Traffic Control" System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function: Working Paper No. 11*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu

