



**New York City Council, Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education**

**Submitted Testimony by Margot Sigmone, Vice President of Early Childhood**

**March 4th, 2026**

On behalf of Children's Aid, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for an oversight hearing on the path to universal childcare.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people, and no limits to their potential. By offering a continuum of services throughout childhood, Children's Aid prepares young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today, nearly 2,000 dedicated full and part time staff members serve nearly 40,000 children, youth, and families across more than 40 sites in New York City. We also engage in policy and advocacy at all levels of government – with our priorities informed both by proven strategies that support children and families and by the persistent barriers our staff confront while serving these communities every day.

As part of our counterattack on the obstacles that threaten children's achievements in school and in life, our Early Childhood Division serves nearly 900 of our youngest learners across nine sites in Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and Staten Island. By offering programs in a range of modalities—including standalone centers, programs embedded in community schools, and home-based settings—we ensure families can access care in the setting that best suits their needs.

In a city where over 80% of families with children under five cannot afford childcare, our early childhood programs are a lifeline for the families we serve. Early childhood programs ease the financial strain on families by helping them balance work and caregiving, while also providing the essential foundation for a child's social-emotional growth and academic development. We've seen firsthand the impact our programs have on children's development, with 93% of our children meeting or exceeding Kindergarten readiness goals in math and 90% doing so in social-emotional development by the end of the last academic year.

Recognizing how transformative our programs are for young people and their families, we are thrilled to see City and State leaders and fellow advocates uplifting universal access to childcare as a top priority for improving affordability and quality of life for all New Yorkers. Families in New York City deserve a truly universal childcare system that includes robust birth to five programs, as well as full year out-of-school time services for students in 3k to 12th grade.

Yet we recognize that we can only expand our childcare system if we deepen investments in and remove barriers for community-based providers and staff, whose success and sustainability are essential for growing our care system but are already at a breaking point. We appreciate and support the proposed legislation today — including [Int 0008-2026](#), [Int 0009-2026](#), [Int 0128-2026](#), [Int 0579-2026](#), [Int 0580-2026](#), [Int 0631-2026](#) — as these measures would ensure our early childhood ecosystem is more transparent, coordinated and can leverage resources efficiently. We also encourage the Council to consider further measures to provide adequate



compensation and support to the providers and early childhood workforce that sustain this ecosystem.

### **Challenges Faced by Early Childhood Providers and Workforce**

The early childhood eco-system is currently at a breaking point, and the biggest threat to its sustainability is the underpayment of the workforce. In 2023, childcare workers had a median income of just \$25,000 – 45 percent of the median income of all other non-child care workers, and the lowest median income of any care work occupation.<sup>1</sup> A recent analysis by the Center for New York City Affairs found that center-based child care workers make on average \$13.85 per hour, less than half the salary of a Pre-K teacher in New York City Public Schools (\$31.25 per hour), despite similar credentials and training requirements.<sup>2</sup> These insufficient salaries have contributed to an exodus of workers and severe staffing challenges.

Compounding the challenges created by underfunded contracts for center-based providers, non-profit early childhood providers are also stifled by dysfunctional and restrictive procurement processes. Because contracting with the city is a long process that includes RFP application and selection, a registration with the Comptroller's office, itemized budget review and approval, and, eventually, invoicing, there are multiple points where a process breakdown can lead to payment delays. Accordingly, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) are often required to front payroll, rent, and program expenses for months before receiving reimbursement from the city, leaving them cash-strapped and unable to hire qualified staff, invest in professional development, or purchase essential supplies.

In addition, inefficient and fragmented data-sharing systems impose significant administrative burdens on nonprofit providers. Organizations are frequently required to enter the same client and program data into multiple, incompatible systems across different city agencies. This duplicative reporting consumes staff time that could otherwise be devoted to direct services and makes it harder to track youth outcomes across programs. The lack of integrated data systems ultimately weakens accountability and makes it more difficult to assess program effectiveness citywide.

We cannot expect to expand our childcare system or solve our city's affordability crisis if the providers themselves are being pushed to the edge of financial collapse. The stability of the early childhood sector is an economic necessity, yet it is currently undermined by a lack of reliable partnership from the City.

### **Measures to increase coordination, transparency, and efficiency**

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<sup>1</sup> The Office of the Comptroller, Brad Lander. Child Care Affordability and the Benefits of Universal Provision. (2025). [Accessed here.](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Center for New York City Affairs. Dignified Pay for Quality Care: What New York's Family Child Care Providers Need to Thrive. (2025). [Accessed here.](#)



Children's Aid supports the legislation proposed in today's hearing because these measures would increase coordination, transparency, and efficiency in our early childhood ecosystem. More specifically, we support each bill for the following reasons:

**Int 0008-2026:** By establishing a seven-year pilot program that would incentivize and remove barriers for owners of vacant commercial premises to meet necessary compliance standards to lease their space to childcare programs, this legislation would make it easier for the City to develop new childcare centers. Children's Aid supports this legislation because it will ultimately expand access to childcare and, its focus on areas with a "low number of child care program slots" will ensure that new investments are targeted in areas with high need.

**Int 0009-2026:** This bill would require the Child Care Advisory Board to collaborate with relevant agencies, including the Department of Buildings and the Fire Department, to study and report on ways to expedite the childcare permitting process. Children's Aid supports this effort to improve interagency coordination and streamline processes for childcare providers, while maintaining essential health and safety standards. We also value the bill's inclusion of input from providers, families, and community organizations to inform practical, effective solutions.

**Int 0128-2026:** This bill would require mayoral agencies that accept public testimony to provide childcare services at public meetings upon request, helping remove a key barrier to family participation. Children's Aid supports this legislation because it would enable more of the families we serve to engage meaningfully in public decision-making processes and ensure their perspectives help shape key policies.

**Int 0579-2026:** This legislation would require the Department of Education (DOE) to partner with NYCHA, DSS, and ACS to conduct a coordinated education and outreach campaign to families eligible for 3-K and pre-K, with a particular focus on low-income households. Children's Aid supports this bill because expanding access to early childhood education begins with ensuring families know their options. Pursuing outreach efforts in multiple languages, in both digital and print modalities, and in varied locations (including in shelters and public housing) will ensure that all families, and especially those with greatest need, receive this critical information.

**Int 0580-2026:** This legislation would codify the Office of Child Care within New York City Government, officially charging the office with improving, coordinating, and expanding childcare across New York City. The office would be formally responsible for overseeing interagency collaboration, workforce development, provider support, capitol planning, annual reporting, and the establishment of funding processes to ensure provider compensation is aligned with the true cost of high-quality care. Children's Aid supports this legislation because achieving universal, free childcare requires clear accountability, centralized coordination, and sustained investment. While New York City does already have an Office of Child Care that provides many of these functions, this legislation would institutionalize the city's commitment to universal care and would ensure that expansion is done in a way that's sustainable and meets the city's needs.

**Int 0631-2026:** This legislation would require the Department of Education (DOE) to publish quarterly reports detailing 3-K and Pre-K seat availability and enrollment, outreach activities, and staff vacancies. By mandating that data be disaggregated by seat type (including school day, extended day and year, and Head Start), program setting, zip code, and special education status, the bill would provide a clearer picture of where available seats align—or fail to align—with family demand. Children’s Aid supports this legislation because transparent, timely data is essential to ensuring that early childhood programs are responsive to community needs, that outreach efforts are effectively reaching families, and that persistent staffing gaps are identified and addressed before they undermine program quality and access. At the same time, we urge the Council to work with DOE to implement these requirements without adding additional administrative burden to nonprofit providers already navigating overlapping reporting mandates.

### **Additional Recommendations to Achieve a Seamless Continuum of Care**

Beyond the legislation heard in this hearing, we urge the Council to consider the following additional recommendations to achieve universal access to a high-quality, affordable and seamless care system.

**1. Strengthen compensation for the early childhood workforce and ensure pay-parity:** In every modality and at every staff level, teachers, staff, directors, and providers in both center-based and home-based childcare programs earn salaries and benefits significantly less than their similarly credentialed counterparts in the public school system. This has led to an exodus of workers and instability in the system. We urge the Council to advance legislative and budgetary solutions that:

- Bring salaries and benefits in contracted early childhood education programs to parity with their counterparts in public schools
- Institute longevity differentials for the ECE workforce in line with comparable roles in public schools
- Adjust rates in home-based programs to allow providers to earn salaries at parity with public school salaries.
- Expedite payments of collectively bargained salary increases

**2. Recognize afterschool and summer programs as essential to universal childcare:** We believe that any commitment to universal childcare should extend beyond early childhood and the traditional school day. For children and youth ages 5–18, high-quality afterschool and summer programs are not ancillary—they are foundational to academic success, social-emotional development, safety, and family economic stability. For working families, the hours between 3:00–6:00 PM and the summer months represent some of the greatest childcare gaps. Without reliable, affordable out-of-school time programming, families—particularly low-income families—face difficult choices between employment and supervision.

We urge the Council to advance legislative and budgetary solutions that would expand and strengthen the City's afterschool and summer school systems, including:

- Transition towards a year-round out-of-school contracted system, one that includes a seamless program covering afterschool and summer hours.
- Allocate additional seats at the requested rates to address the disparity of programs to the youth population in each community.
- Center the needs of families and students in temporary housing, foster care, ELL, and students with disabilities in determining access.
  - Invest in the Capital Plan to make building structures ADA accessible
  - Invest in paraprofessionals for afterschool programs to ensure continuity for students from school day to afterschool.

**3. Ensure human service nonprofit providers are paid on time and at rates that reflect the true cost of delivering services:** New York City relies on nonprofit providers to implement its child care and out-of-school time systems, yet chronic payment delays and structural underfunding undermine the sector's stability. Lengthy and fragmented contracting processes routinely delay registration and reimbursement, forcing organizations to front payroll, rent, and program costs for months at a time.

At the same time, city contracts often fail to cover the full cost of delivering high-quality services. Suppressed wage structures, insufficient indirect cost reimbursement, and the absence of annual cost escalators force providers to absorb growing financial gaps. In afterschool programs in particular, current reimbursement rates fall well below actual operating costs, forcing organizations to divert private funding, reduce service quality, or pay wages that are not competitive in New York City's labor market.

Nonprofit providers are the unseen infrastructure underpinning our childcare system, and we cannot reach universality without ensuring their stability. We urge the Council to advance legislative and budgetary solutions that:

- Immediately pay all outstanding invoices for services already delivered
- Raise base wages in human service contracts and establish an appropriate wage floor
- Include annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) in all contracts
- Reimburse providers for their approved indirect cost rates (ICRs)
- Fully implement and expand ContractStat to track contracting and payment delays
- Make partial invoice payments standard practice across agencies
- Invest in improvements to PASSPort and increase contract management capacity
- Engage providers early in the RFP process to ensure contracts are fiscally viable and responsive to community needs



**Closing:**

A thriving New York City requires a strong, stable, and equitable early childhood ecosystem—one that supports children’s development, enables families to participate fully in the workforce, and sustains the nonprofit providers and educators who make this system possible. We thank Chair Guttierrez and the New York City Council Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education Aid for holding this hearing, and we stand ready to partner to build a childcare system that truly meets the needs of New York City’s children and families.

Please feel free to contact Annie Nelson at [anelson@childrensaidnyc.org](mailto:anelson@childrensaidnyc.org) with any questions regarding this testimony.