



New York State
Senate Committee on Children and Families
Assembly Standing Committee on Children and Families
Assembly Legislative Taskforce on Women's Issues

Hearing to examine barriers to accessing quality child day care and how such lack of access relates to a variety of issues including child development, family stability and the economy.

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Presented by: Jane Brown, Executive Director

My name is Jane Brown; I am the Executive Director of Child Care Resources of Rockland, Inc. It is my understanding that this public hearing is to provide an opportunity to share our thoughts on improving the quality of and accessibility to child care programs in New York.

You asked us to examine the need for increased access to quality child care as well as the impact on children, families, the labor force and the economy. In New York we have a splintered system where there are several agencies, grassroots organizations, governmental departments and individuals working toward a similar goal, but often with differing messages. This seems to cause confusion for the very people we want to influence on behalf of children.

Suggestion: We need an actual state Office of Early Childhood that only thinks about children: early learning, foster care, mental health, physical health, special needs, abuse, neglect and trauma at all ages from prenatal through age 8 or 12. Services that serve our youngest children are critically lacking. For instance, in Rockland County, we have virtually no services for children under 5 years who suffer trauma or are not eligible for early intervention or preschool special education but have severe issues of depression or PTSD. Teachers in child care programs are not adequately prepared to teach and care for children with so many varying needs and backgrounds.

There must also be a more unified and consistent investment strategy for children. Yes, I have heard that there is "a lot" of money invested in young children. Then why are so few served? If we do not help children start and stay at a quality early childhood program, they will not learn healthy social interactions or acceptable ways to react to their emotions. This is the best solution to reduce and eradicate juvenile crime. The Raise the Age legislation was a huge discussion point in the 2017 state budget. We may not even have to have those discussions if our investment is in quality early learning programs for our youngest children because we would not have the same numbers of juveniles in the justice system.

I have read the legislation that is being considered that would establish a child care availability taskforce to evaluate the need for and availability of child care throughout the state. I support this legislation as an important part of the work to address the child care crisis. To be successful the taskforce will need resources and someone who has the skills for data collection and analysis. Data is all well and good but we must also get the systems in order so the data collected is worthwhile and useful? Data about children's needs would be very helpful. For instance do we know the number of children who are receiving combined support funds for special needs, prekindergarten, Head Start and child care subsidy - all at the same time? Some communities blend funding very well and children may receive services for 10 hour days using funds from all these pots. Some communities do not have the guidance to provide such services or receive guidance that prohibits the ability to do such blending, and so they segregate children into funding streams, causing their days to be inconsistent and in programs of lower quality.

Facilitated Enrollment for child care assistance is available to only a very few communities in New York State. Many of us in the industry are consistently assisting families with how to apply for child care assistance, but we do not receive any compensation for the work.

I know that we are primarily focusing on Child Care but we must also consider other funding streams. I understand that Prekindergarten is not funded through children and families committees, but that also speaks to the fragmented non-system we have for young children. For the last 3 budget cycles (2015, 2016 and 2017) prekindergarten has been open only to school districts with high needs. Could we not open it to children with high needs within all school districts?

Early childhood programs, that have served children since Universal Prekindergarten started 20 years ago, are still receiving the same amount of money as when they started: for some that is only \$2,700 per child for 10 months. If we do not get these prekindergarten programs under control with appropriate funds, consistent guidance and policy, they will implode. Several have closed already in Rockland County, which is one of the few counties in the state where every school district has one or more of the state prekindergarten programs.

When considering the child care workforce, we must consider professional development and career advancement for early childhood educators: However, in general, the quality of professional development is certainly decreasing when more and more child care teachers are receiving their training through on-line courses that they can repeat every two years and still receive the "credit" they need for licensing. We have set up a system of mandates for training that causes early educators to just take what they need and be done with it; not engage in professional development that is low-cost, high quality, interactive and on-going so they think they are professionals and are being treated like professionals, not babysitters who can sit through a video, sleep and then pass a test. Investment directly affects professional development in our field.

In today's economy, when having both parents in the workforce is an economic necessity for many families, we need affordable, high-quality early childhood opportunities more than ever. It's not a nice-to-have – it's a must-have. So it's time we stop treating early childhood care and education as a side issue, or as a women's issue, and treat it like the national economic priority that it is for all of us.

Why do many of our government officials not understand the magnitude of how policies and funding affect children? Thinking that our government officials knew the facts, I was completely speechless and totally devastated by the outcome of the 2017 NYS budget for children.

I would like to offer some suggestions:

1. Invest in the New York State workforce and human capital by paying for it while children are young. As James Heckman, Nobel Prize winning economist has discovered, there is as much as a \$17 earned to every \$1 spent on early childhood education. Fight Crime Invest in Kids, our colleagues in law enforcement, say “Quality early education readies kids to learn, reinforces respect and responsibility for others and reduces behavior problems that can spiral out of control.”

2. Invest funds into tuition assistance programs to equate to scholarships for young children such as is provided for college bound students so that children can have access to quality education when their parents are at their lower earning years. Or how about free tuition for all, to equate with the new tuition-free college for New York freshmen.

3. Invest in the QUALITYstarsNY system. What good is any facility if it is not of high quality?

4. Re-evaluate the funding allocations for Pre-kindergarten. The districts that receive the mere \$2,700 per child have found many of the community based organizations cannot afford to continue to provide the UPK services...they are losing too much money. This review of the funds for all PreK could then include:

- Allocating funds for an eight hour PreK day vs. the 2.5 hours or even the 5 hour “full day”
- Re-opening PreK to all districts across the state that have not yet had the opportunity to start PreK or lost out on the required funding for only high needs school districts AND allow districts that have offered Prek expand without needing to prove they are high needs districts.
- Transporting children for Prek
- Study how funds are blended and are they double-used, which might show that funding could be used to serve more children.

5. Change the compulsory age to five years (or even three or four years) for public school. Provide funds for full day kindergarten. Local example: I will never forget the mother of the enrolling kindergarten child as they walked down the hall for the kindergarten screening. This is in a Rockland district that has full day kindergarten for children who were considered “at risk” and half day kindergarten for everyone else. The mom said, “Remember, you do not know the color green.” Hence, she wanted her daughter to learn to manipulate her way into full day Kindergarten.

Our children and youth are facing serious problems. Many are living in poverty. Far too many drop out of school. Hundreds still go without health insurance.

Every day children are dealing with unsafe neighborhoods and schools. These problems need to be addressed not increased. I want solutions.

Children need our help NOW – they cannot wait until the deficit has been recovered, roads have been repaired, bridges have been built, tunnels have been dug, walls have been built, elections have been won, the war against terrorism is over or global warming has been eradicated.