

HIGH QUALITY, AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

Empire State Economic Security Campaign

ES2 endorses the *Winning Beginning NY* agenda which supports several of Governor Spitzer's early care and education initiatives, including universal prekindergarten and the implementation of a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).

We urge the Legislature to address a number of issues that were not included in the *Executive Budget*. We ask the Legislature to:

- Invest in the early childhood workforce
- Increase child care funding
- Increase funding for infant/toddler resource centers
- Provide flexibility in Pre-K funding

Early childhood workforce

We urge you to invest \$15 million in an Excellence in Early Childhood Workforce Initiative. This initiative includes a professional development component, equitable compensation, and loan forgiveness.

- Research shows that a qualified workforce is critical to achieving positive outcomes for children.
- The state's early childhood workforce is poorly compensated and without the resources to seek the education and credentials they need and want to provide quality care and education.
- While 60% of Pre-K is provided in child care settings, teachers in public school Pre-K programs are paid significantly more than those in community-based programs. As a result, community-based Pre-K teachers leave as soon as they are able to secure employment in the public school system.
- The results for children and families are disastrous—the shortage of qualified early childhood professionals is at an all-time high, with turnover running 30 to 40 percent in many community programs. A growing number of early childhood workers are leaving the field permanently.
- The Excellence in Early Childhood Workforce Initiative provides a road map to building on the ambition, talent, and dedication of workers already on the job and to attracting the professionals to the field that the state needs to meet its goals to provide high-quality early care and education.

Child care funding

We urge you to transfer \$367 million in funding from the Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS) to the child care block grant to prevent further erosion in child care funding and ensure that low-income working families have access to child care subsidies.

- Counties are burdened by costs and challenged by the need to provide a range of services.
- Therefore, we understand the state's rationale behind putting child care funding back in the FFFS. At first glance, it appears that including child care in the FFFS allows counties flexibility.
- However, doing so actually forces counties to choose between funding competing children's issues—all of which are worthy.

- Removing child care from the FFFS (as the Legislature so wisely did last year) will ensure that New York State, at a minimum, does not reduce its investment in services for working parents.
- This is important because over the past few years it has become increasingly difficult for low-income working families to access the subsidies that they need.

In addition, we urge you to add \$140 million for child care slots that have been lost over the past few years. This funding would restore the 14,000 lost slots and add an additional 14,000 subsidized slots.

- Child care is an essential component of a working family's life.
- Without subsidy assistance, low-income working families must make choices about child care services that could put their children at risk. Sometimes they are even forced to forgo employment and seek public assistance.
- Research documents the benefit to low-income children of high-quality child care programs, which provide a foundation for later success in school and in life.
- This is the setting in which, starting in infancy, many children spend more than 10 hours a day.
- In fact, high-quality child care provides the basis for success in pre-kindergarten. The full implementation of universal Pre-K depends on the quality of our child care services.

Infant/toddler resource centers

We urge you to allocate \$2.4 million to expand funding for Infant/Toddler Resource Centers, strengthen the capacity for coordination between Centers, and assess the impact of Center interventions on improving the quality of care for infants and toddlers.

- Research clearly documents the importance of the first three years of life in shaping the emotional, social, and cognitive development of children.
- With approximately 55% of all young children in New York in child care, there is a compelling need to focus specific resources on our very youngest learners.
- The seven Infant/Toddler Resource Centers are located in CCR&Rs across the state and work in every county to promote excellence in Infant/Toddler services in all settings.
- They offer direct services to the early care and education community including intensive technical assistance, training, coaching, resource information, and linkages to other social and community supports.
- They also serve as a best practice information center for parents, the regional Office of Children and Family Services licensing offices, and other professionals working with this age group.
- The Infant/Toddler Centers are entering the fifth year without any increase in funding.

Flexibility in Pre-K funding

We urge you to allow for flexibility so that districts can provide high-quality programs appropriate to their individual needs, with funding from the baseline amount available to support both the per/pupil rate and:

- a. Start-up expenses (including equipment and classroom modifications) and planning /coordination to ensure full participation by CBO's as well as public schools
- b. Full-day programs
- c. Developmentally-appropriate transportation to/from programs
- d. Professional development to increase both staff retention and staff qualifications

e. TA and other supports to districts with high-need, at-risk children not currently participating in Pre-K

- Some school districts have said that not being able to use funds for these things limits their ability to provide services.
- Some are not offering Pre-K programs because they do not have transportation or only need full-day.

This flexibility will assist districts that are struggling to provide high-quality programs because they do not have the infrastructure, staff, or other supports necessary to create or continue a program.