



Empire State Campaign for Child Care

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For Immediate Release

Contact: Dede Hill (Director of Policy, Schuyler Center), 518/879-6616

Beth Starks (Director, Chautauqua Lake Child Care Center), 716/269-4106

Advocates Applaud Governor for Expanding Access to Child Care for Essential Workers but More Action is Needed

Advocates and child care providers across New York State are thanking Governor Cuomo for investing some federal CARES Act funds to provide child care at no cost to low and middle-income essential workers. Today's announcement will allow healthcare, law enforcement, grocery store and other essential employees to continue to work during the COVID-19 pandemic, knowing that their young children are in safe hands.

Child care can be challenging to access and afford for parents in normal times. For essential workers during the pandemic – who are being asked to work long hours while their school age children are out of school, at a time when they cannot rely on older relatives and neighbors to assist with care -- the challenge of finding and affording safe care for their young and school-aged children is greater than ever. We are pleased New York has joined many of our sister states in enacting this plan to provide some of our essential workers safe, quality, free child care.

In these extraordinary circumstances, it is also critical that child care providers that stay open – at significant personal risk – are provided the safety equipment and timely guidance necessary to keep themselves and the children in their programs safe. This plan will help ensure these programs have access to the cleaning supplies and safety equipment they need to provide as safe care as possible.

While this plan is a welcome step, more is needed.

1. If the scholarship fund is insufficient to serve all eligible essential workers, New York must draw down more of the \$163.4 million in CARES Act funds to ensure no essential workers are left out.
2. The scholarships, and all subsidies paid during this period should be based on an enhanced market rate to cover the increased costs child care providers are facing, including that providers are operating at significantly reduced capacity to allow for social distancing and because many families are keeping their children at home.

3. The child care programs that choose to remain open at this time need help and sector-specific guidance from public health officials on how to keep the children in their care, and themselves, safe. The nature of the job of caring for children, particularly young children, poses unique and significant health risks. Young children do not “social distance,” in fact, they need close contact to have their diapers and clothing changed, for mealtime help, and to be carried and hugged. Further, there is ever more data emerging showing that children play a major role in transmission of the virus, and can get seriously ill from it.

4. Child care providers who are now being asked to work on the frontlines are often paid little more than minimum wage and receive no benefits. They must be provided comprehensive health coverage, access to COVID-19 testing, and hazard pay.

5. To keep the essential child care workforce and the children in their care safe, the State must collect data on the number of providers and children who become ill, how many programs are forced to close due to the virus, and what other support they need to keep their doors open safely. With COVID-19 likely to present a significant public health threat for another 12-18 months, it is essential that New York constantly monitor the health impacts on this sector, and constantly revise safety practices as the data dictates.

6. Our economy cannot restart without sufficient child care capacity. When additional parents are allowed to return to work, they will need care – particularly if businesses begin to reopen before schools and camps – which seems likely. Unfortunately, this sector was struggling pre-pandemic. Many of the providers that have closed in the face of the virus are uncertain that they will have the means to re-open. We must ensure that programs can do so safely and expeditiously. In the immediate, New York should direct and use federal funds to cover expenses for ALL local department of social services across the State to pay providers participating in the child care subsidy program for March, April and May 2020 based on the number of children enrolled on March 1, regardless of attendance, and develop a fund to enable providers to apply for grants to cover lost private-pay tuition as our neighbor Vermont has done. If these steps are not taken, there may not be a viable industry on the other side of this crisis.

Once again, we applaud this first step, but urge New York to immediately take these additional actions to ensure that the child care industry remains vital, that parents can continue or return to work, and that children receive safe, quality care and education during the pandemic, and in the future.