



Empire State Campaign for Child Care

PRESS RELEASE

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NY Forward Child Care Expansion Incentive Unavailable to the Providers Who Offered Emergency Care Throughout the Pandemic

Despite being glad to hear that Governor Cuomo plans to release more federal CARES Act funds to help child care providers cover costs of safety and cleaning supplies, and to upgrade facilities to meet heightened safety requirements, child care providers, parents, and advocates across NYS voiced dismay that the Governor's Reopening and Expansion Incentive Grants will be available only to child care providers who closed during the pandemic and are now seeking to reopen. **Left out are the thousands of child care programs that have remained open for all or part of the public health emergency - at great personal risk to themselves and their families -- to care for the children of essential workers.** Parents and providers are also expressing huge frustration that **they do not have meaningful representation on any of the NY Forward reopening teams**, resulting in initiatives, like this one, that are piecemeal and do not adequately meet the needs of working families and the child care providers that serve them.

This exclusion comes after months of hardship for child care programs that stayed open. These programs – including school-aged programs - are overwhelmingly operated by women (most, women of color) and they kept their doors open at great personal risk to themselves and their families. Providers spent frustrating hours online and on the phone trying to follow ever-changing best safety practices. Many could not get licensors on the phone to answer questions. These programs continue to struggle on a daily basis to find PPE, food, and basic cleaning supplies, on top of caring for and educating children, at a time when they are stressed by the realities of life in a pandemic.

Further, the decision to remain open with significantly decreased enrollment, and increased costs related to additional health and safety precautions, has placed these programs at great financial risk. A large majority of programs that remained open during the pandemic are family and group family providers in lower-income communities. Excluding these providers from this much-needed financial support will lead many of them to close, leaving more families of color without access to child care in their own communities, deepening and reinforcing long-standing racial inequities. All programs will have to operate at reduced capacity for the foreseeable future, to comply with new – and appropriate – public health guidance. Simply stated, the challenges facing the programs that remained open during the health emergency are the same, if not greater, than those faced by the providers who closed and are now seeking to reopen.

Child care programs also expressed real concern that the grants being offered are too small, and will be phased out too quickly to enable many programs to reopen. It is estimated that 36% of child care programs and 70% of school-age child care programs are currently closed. The grants, as currently conceived, top out at only \$6000. Modeling by The Children's Agenda published in early June shows a typical child care center in NYS seeing revenue dropping to 62% of pre-pandemic revenues, underscoring that this amount will not suffice to bring stability to most programs. Further, the grants will phase out over the second and third months. Given that NYS is planning to continue with social distancing well into the fall, it is fully expected that child care programs will be operating at significantly reduced capacity for months. There is little reason to believe that child care programs' need for operating support will diminish significantly in a month.

"The Governor's release of \$65 million of CARES Act funds is an important step to enable afterschool providers to implement social distancing and other safeguards to keep children and staff safe," said Kelly Sturgis, Executive Director of the NYS Network for Youth Success. "But limiting this funding to providers who closed during the pandemic overlooks those who risked their lives to stay open. More than 70% of school-age child care programs are currently closed and many more are on the brink of financial disaster. The State must release the remaining CARES funds to help cover basic operating expenses for all providers. Without addressing these immediate needs, programs cannot remain financially viable and protect the children and families who depend on them."

"Governor Cuomo's proposal for the investment of \$65M in CARES funding to support child care may be well intentioned but falls far short of what is truly needed to successfully reopen and sustain child care programs. As an Executive Director for 25 years, I am no stranger to the struggle, sacrifice, and hardships necessary to keep a center open. Our current closure has already cost us over \$50,000 in tuition. We anticipate when we reopen in September we will lose over \$15,000 per month in tuition due to the new restrictions on class size and health and safety precautions. Our commitment to the children, families, their employers, and our community has not changed. However, the cost of providing this essential service has! It needs to be recognized as the critical work it is and for the important role it plays in reopening all businesses by supporting parents' return to work. We need your help to do this right, do this smart, and build back better!" said Deborah Fitzgerald, Executive Director of Cub Care Children's Center, Vestal, NY.

Gladys Jones has been a family based provider in New York City for decades. At the beginning of March, 2020, she had 16 children enrolled; as of June she had none. In response to the Governor's recent announcement, she said, "I can't help it; I am NOT EXCITED. We (family based providers) have not seen anything yet that even touches what we need. The money allocated before this for PPE was not enough, and much of that has not even reached the organizations who are supposed to distribute it to providers. So those of us who have struggled to stay open for other essential workers (yes we are essential workers too!!) still do not have the supplies we need. Why is it we are still dying??? Give us direct grants. We know how to use it!"

Vonetta T. Rhodes, Ed.M. is a former provider, a parent, and a leader with a community-based child care advocacy group in Buffalo called the Western New York Child Care Action Team. "It's not enough. If a provider has been closed for at least 3 months, ordering food and PPE will wipe out the money in almost 2 weeks. Based on recent guidelines, reopening and continuing providers will need much more than just PPE and supplies to fully meet health and safety protocols. Some providers will now have to expand or renovate to accommodate school age and preschool classrooms; they will need new cots with different non-absorptive material; a washer/dryer on the premises; more wall partitions in bathrooms; cubbies instead of coat hooks; COVID tests; cleaning equipment, additional staffing, and so much more. Meanwhile, it could take at least 60 days to start to see any revenue."

"A \$300-\$1600 grant is not worth my time applying for. I have so many fires to put out right now. This is preposterous," said Juliana Pinot McKeen, a family-based provider in Brooklyn who provided care for twelve children per day prior to the COVID shut down. "I also think this is disingenuous spending of tax payer dollars. That money is supposed to help save child care, right? That's why it's earmarked, and the State is fumbling this. This absolutely misses the mark."

Carol Garboden Murray, who operates Abigail Lundquist Botstein Nursery School in the Hudson Valley, said "This is sad. It won't move the needle much. I don't know if I'd take the time to do the paperwork and prove my worth for this amount. Very sad to be sad about this good news."

"If nonessential workers from a well-known coffeehouse are paid an extra \$3 for hazard pay, what are we saying is the value of family child care workers who take care of the essential worker's children for long hours every day, without hazard pay? I don't feel like I am worth a cup of coffee," said Shanita Bowen, a family-based provider in The Bronx.

"The Governor's announcement for extra funding under the CARES Act displays little understanding of our needs as early childhood care providers or our families' needs for nurturing spaces for the whole child. We demand our voices to be heard as a collective but also as individual centers. We want to tell the governor what we need-- not be told what HE thinks we need! Can he send a representative to talk face-to-face, visit our spaces, and meet our families, teachers, and staff members? In order to best provide for our young children, he must witness our terrain. We will wear masks," said Pascale Setbon, The Language and Laughter Studio, Brooklyn, NY.

The thoughtful recommendations of those on the front lines--those most impacted by, and experienced with, the challenges of child care in this new environment, have been largely overlooked by state and regional decision makers. On numerous occasions since the pandemic struck, parents, child care programs, and children's advocates across NYS have come together and offered the State their carefully considered recommendations about how to most effectively use the federal CARES Act, existing state child care funds, and state

economic development dollars, to safely care for the children of parents who must work outside of the home now, and to use this moment to re-envision and re-structure a state child care infrastructure that was already in crisis before the pandemic and now stands on the brink of collapse. **We once again ask Governor Cuomo to implement recommendations informed by parents desperately seeking safe, affordable child care so they can return to work, and by the child care educators ready and eager to welcome more children back into care.**