



Empire State Campaign for Child Care

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For Immediate Release

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NY FEDERAL AND STATE LEADERS CONDUCT CHILD CARE IS ESSENTIAL ROUNDTABLE

As federal leaders gather this week to negotiate a defense bill and the next COVID relief package, New York children and families continue to cope with the health, economic and other impacts of the pandemic. Uppermost in the minds of many working parents is how to find and afford safe, high-quality child care for their young children.

Last night, July 22, 2020, federal and state elected leaders gathered together with more than 200 parents, providers and advocates for a virtual #ChildCareIsEssential roundtable to elevate the need for **at least \$50 billion in federal funding for child care in the next federal COVID relief package**. The event was hosted by Assemblymembers Michaelle Solages and Ellen Jaffee, and the Empire State Campaign for Child Care. Participating were U.S. Senator Kristen Gillibrand, Congresswoman Grace Meng, and Congressman Adriano Espaillat, Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul, NYS Senators Robert Jackson, Andrew Gounardes and George Borrello, and Assemblymember Andy Hevesi.

“Research shows that high-quality child care can benefit not only our children but also the fiscal health of our general communities. However, the availability, accessibility, and affordability of quality child care is a challenge for so many families across our country,” **stated Assemblymember Michaelle Solages, who kicked off the event**. “The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the need for affordable child care, and as parents adapt to new schooling guidelines for the upcoming semester, we must ensure that they have the proper support to safeguard their families. Thank you to all the parents and advocates who joined the roundtable and for highlighting New York’s unique struggles regarding child care.”

Our nation was facing a child care crisis even before the pandemic hit, with millions of working families struggling to afford high-quality and safe child care,” said **U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand**. “Now our nation’s child care providers, and parents who rely on them, are facing unprecedented instability and challenges to safely operate. There’s no recovering from this recession if parents can’t get back to work, and the Child Care is Essential Act will support providers who have been providing care to the children of essential workers during this crisis and those who have had to temporarily close their doors. I will continue fighting in Congress to pass this critical legislation to ensure that providers can safely and efficiently operate so they can help parents get back to work as businesses open.”



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“The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated racial, social, and gender-based inequalities that still exist in our society today, and nowhere is that more present than with the child care crisis that we have struggled with for far too long,” **said New York Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul.** “To get our economy back firing on all cylinders, the stress and cost of the child care burden must be addressed. It is no longer an individual family’s problem, it’s a problem for our economic recovery, and it’s finally part of the national conversation. In New York, we’re increasing funding, expanding services and supporting families and child care workers during this crisis and beyond. But together, we need to make sure that any planning for what comes after this period includes a plan for expanding access to child care in our state and across the country.”

Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families said “Quality child care and early education is important for our children’s healthy development, and for families to achieve economic security and independence. That is why we need a serious investment in our child care system. Providers, majority of whom are women of color, have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic. These providers have stayed open with a reduced number of children to care for and have been forced to adapt to new safety standards in order to remain open. They have done this without the necessary funds to support them. Like many essential services, Childcare centers key to our re-opening. We must support them with more funding so that they can remain open and continue caring for our children.”

“I thank Assemblywoman Solages and the Empire State Campaign for Child Care for convening tonight’s roundtable on the challenges we face in safely reopening and scaling up child care centers in New York and the country, said **Congresswoman Grace Meng.** As a mother of two young boys, balancing family and work is difficult in the best circumstances and it wasn’t easy before the national health crisis and it certainly isn’t now. But my kids are out of child care and for parents with young children that relied on child care before the crisis, they confront an enormous barrier to their careers and family responsibilities. It doesn’t have to be this way. Congress must do more to help reopen child care centers and that starts with \$50 billion toward the safety of those centers. I look forward to working with my congressional colleagues to achieve this.”

State Senator Robert Jackson said, “Quality child care is an important human right for all people. Working families and single parent households must have it. Their children need and deserve high quality care so they have a sound foundation for their education and to ensure them a bright future. It’s time for the federal government to step now with the billions we need to address this statewide need.”

“We are in a childcare emergency. Unless we act to fully fund childcare, working families will suffer and our state’s economic wellbeing will suffer. A just society is one that invests in the next



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generation and helps people achieve their potential. We have the opportunity to do that by ensuring childcare for all in New York State,” **said State Senator Andrew Gounardes.**

“We cannot expect New York State to re-open without a proper investment in the childcare industry. As more parents return to work, we must ensure access to safe, appropriate, and affordable childcare. Our childcare workers have been consistently providing for our children and families in the face of enormous hardship, it is time for our government to step up and deliver much needed economic relief to keep this crucial industry afloat,” **said Assemblymember Hevesi, Chair of the Assembly Social Services Committee.**

“The pandemic and the economic pressures it created forced many child care providers to close their doors permanently and required great financial and personal sacrifices of those who remained open to serve essential workers,” said **State Senator George M. Borrello.** “Even before COVID-19, the lack of quality, affordable child care was a big barrier to full-time employment for many women and families in my district. That situation has only worsened in the wake of the pandemic. Rebuilding the foundation of our economy must begin with rebuilding our child care industry, which is why a major investment of federal funds is urgent.”

Juliana Pinto McKeen, co-founder and director of Honeybirds Playschool in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn described the journey she traveled from running a well-established and respected child care center; through falling attendance as COVID spread across the city; to serving families remotely; applying for and then running out of PPP assistance, and the recent final heart breaking decision to close down her business. “There is a catch-22 that a lot of schools find themselves in. It may not be safe to open in the way that was budgeted before the pandemic, but we can’t make it otherwise. Child care has no margins. At the beginning of the pandemic, it was estimated that 50% of childcare programs would have to close. Four weeks ago, I did not think my program was going to be one of those. It all happened so fast.”

Beth Starks, parent of three, and Executive Director of Chautauqua Lake Child Care Center. “This issue to me is not political. It is very much bipartisan and I believe that we have to all come together to support children and families,” said Stark. “In doing so, we support our economic infrastructure and the future of our state. If we aren’t making decisions based on what is best for our youngest citizens, then we are doing a disservice to our entire population. I will always believe every challenge is an opportunity and we have the opportunity now to do the right thing for our current workforce and for our state's youngest citizens, our future.

Other participants in last night’s events shared these statements:

“As essential workers before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, child care workers are a vital piece of the economy. It is imperative that we stabilize and reimagine the industry to be one that includes resources for the providers to remain open and allow families to work and children to learn. We are thrilled to see lawmakers recognize this and hope that their colleagues



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will heed their call for more support of the system moving forward.” **-Jessica Klos Shapiro, Director of Policy and Community Education, Early Care & Learning Council**

“As a union representing more than 11,000 in-home child care providers across New York State, we see first-hand the devastation that the pandemic has caused child care providers. A recent survey indicates that without additional federal aid at least 2 out of 5 child care programs will close permanently. The risk is even greater for minority-owned child care programs, where more than half will close without additional aid. COVID-19 has wrecked our state and local budgets, and we simply can’t get back on track without federal aid. Reopening in New York simply can’t happen without us. Without child care options, how can families return to work? We urge the New York Congressional Delegation to pass the Child Care is Essential Act . This legislation will provide \$50 billion in new funds for child care, which will allow working families to go back to work and know that they have quality, licensed child care to rely on.” **-Pam Wells, President of CSEA/VOICE Local 100A, Owner of Wells Wonder World, Family Child Care Program in Argyle, NY**

“Child care availability and affordability coupled with COVID-related staggered school schedules is predicted to drive thousands of the 71% of working women out of the workforce. But with 41% of these women being primary breadwinners, where does that leave the family? Child care is a public good—and an essential workforce support to re-build our economy and promote racial, economic and gender equity. The United States must build an accessible and affordable child care system that supports an equitable and robust society.” **-Sheri L Scavone, Executive Director, Western New York Women’s Foundation.**

“We are here tonight because we know there can be no recovery from the pandemic without child care! Every day, more parents are being called back to work, but many child care providers do not have the means to safely remain open, or re-open, to provide quality child care so parents can participate in the economic recovery. Further, with many schools, including the NYC school district, planning to provide in-school instruction on a staggered basis, families’ need for child care is going to be even greater in the coming months than ever before.” **-Dede Hill, Policy Director for the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy and a facilitator of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care**

Gladys Jones of Early Childhood Educators On the Move, who has helped lead a major small provider-based advocacy movement for change in New York City, thanked all those who participated on the call and noted that up to the present moment, “child care has not been a priority of this nation. I hope that this is the beginning of a bipartisan legacy to SAVE CHILDCARE.” Without an across-the-aisle effort, championed by those with power and influence, we will not succeed. And New York State –or the world for that matter—will simply not be able to revive if we do not support and invest in children, families and child care providers.”