



Statement from the Empire State Campaign for Child Care On the Final Enacted 2024-25 New York State Budget

Albany N.Y. (April 22, 2024). The Empire State Campaign for Child Care has advocated for a statewide universal child care system, where child care and early childhood education are treated as a public good rather than a private, family burden. We have celebrated Governor Hochul's long history as a champion for child care and watched with pride as she used her position to expand access to more families - including in this year's budget, which includes new state investment in the child care assistance program.

"Unfortunately, access to child care assistance means nothing to a family that cannot find a fully-staffed child care program able to care for their child. This budget is likely to worsen the state's already severe child care workforce shortage, which will in turn deepen the capacity shortage." said **Shoshana Hershkowitz, Campaign Manager for the Empire State Campaign for Child Care.**

Here's why: this budget includes a reduced investment in the child care workforce compared to last year - a workforce overwhelmingly composed of women, women of color, and immigrant women. **Yes—this budget will deliver a pay cut to many members of the child care workforce, a workforce that earns less than 96% of other occupations.** These cuts come at a moment when child care programs are already operating under capacity, even while carrying waitlists because of workforce shortages due to low wages.

"Family child care providers in New York City express profound disappointment over the failure of Governor Hochul to uphold her commitment and promise to prioritize child care. Despite assurances that child care was crucial to her agenda, the absence of a dedicated workforce fund is deeply disheartening. Providers hoped that additional funds would enhance the quality of child care they want to offer and to finally secure improved compensation for themselves. Furthermore, the failure to allocate funds for the development of a 'cost of care' model, as recommended by the federal government, is a stark indication of disregard for the vital work of educators, especially those from marginalized communities. By neglecting to include these provisions, New York implicitly suggests that women of color - particularly those serving in underprivileged areas - are undeserving of equitable wages. This not only undermines the dedication of these educators but also perpetuates inequality by denying children in these communities access to adequately resourced programs.", said **Shanita Bowen, Chief Operating Officer of ECE on the Move.**

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It is a decision that jeopardizes the important expansions to child care assistance New York has made since 2022, because it is a decision that will result in more staff shortages, causing more programs to close classrooms - or close altogether - leaving more children and families without child care, and causing more families to leave New York because they cannot afford to stay. For two years, the Empire State Campaign for Child Care has called for establishing a permanent workforce compensation fund that would begin to address the chronically low wages of the child care workforce, and help to strengthen a sector that was struggling long before the Covid-19 pandemic. The federal relief money was a crucial resource but has since expired, and in light of this disinvestment we called on the State to step up. We advocated for a permanent investment fund because one-time “bonuses” or “retention grants” do not create a landscape where professionals can feel confident in the stability of this line of work. The Assembly and Senate added critical workforce funds in their one-house budgets, only to have the Governor and leadership reject this proposal in the final budget.

“Since 2019, the Adirondacks has lost almost 30% of its child care capacity. We were a desert then and we continue to be a desert today. Without meaningful systemic changes and ongoing support, our economy will continue to struggle to find workers as there is no child care capacity to support our families. New York must look beyond our borders to see how other states and nations have found ways to support child care.” said **Kate Ryan, Director of the Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance.**

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Leaders also missed the opportunity to once and for all ensure that parents who work variable hours in retail, the trades, the gig economy, and food service can access child care by ending the State’s practice of tying child care assistance to caretakers’ exact hours of work—known as decoupling. Legislation to end this practice—which has disproportionately kept low-income, immigrant, and Black and brown New York families from accessing child care assistance—was passed by the Legislature last year then vetoed by the Governor, with instructions for the Legislature to take the issue up in budget negotiations. But while the Legislature included this proposal in both of their one-house budgets, it was removed during negotiations.

“The State’s final budget deals a devastating setback to the child care workforce and the future of New York’s children and families. The budget allocates less funding for the workforce than it did the year before. Accessible and affordable child care is not a luxury – it’s an absolute necessity for ensuring that all children, regardless of their background or zip code, have the support they need to thrive. With a shrinking workforce, we need the state to step up and invest in wages so it can attract more people - not fewer. The governor’s decision to cut funds from the child care workforce perpetuates systemic inequities for women, particularly Black, brown, immigrant and low income women. The governor has clearly illustrated that her budgets are only about talking points, not real investment in New Yorkers,” said **Marina Marcou-O'Malley, Co-Executive Director for Alliance for Quality Education.**

*“NYS leaders made a decision this budget season to not increase compensation for the child care workforce, thereby continuing to pay poverty wages to people doing anti-poverty work—the same workforce that was deemed essential and allowed others to work throughout the pandemic. Not only that—they chose not to decouple a parent’s child care assistance from their work hours (especially important for those in the gig, retail, and restaurant industries) and to not take initial steps toward a model that will establish—and pay—the true cost of providing care. We are disappointed that the Governor—first woman, first mother, first grandmother in office—talked the talk at the White House just last week, making the important connection between child care and the economy, but then did not deliver a budget that actually supports the child care workforce, who are primarily Black and brown women. We remain committed to ensuring that all families of young children, but particularly those in low-income households, children of color, and those in underserved groups, have access to quality programs and to the caregivers/educators that provide quality care.”, said **Jenn O’Connor, Director of Partnerships and Early Childhood Policy at the Education Trust of New York.***

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Finally, also rejected in the final budget was a proposal to implement an equitable, fair method of setting child care assistance reimbursement rates. This “cost estimation model” proposal is an essential component to achieving a transformed, sustainable, equitable child care system in New York.

There are a few bright spots to celebrate. As noted, this budget adds state funds to expand access to child care assistance. The budget includes a small - but important - child care subsidy rate hike for providers offering care during evening, early morning, and weekend hours (known as non-traditional hours), and those serving children experiencing homelessness. There is also an increase in funding for a small pilot project that began last year to provide child care assistance to families barred by federal rules from accessing child care assistance due to immigration status, or because they work episodic hours. The budget also calls for a feasibility study on universal afterschool statewide. Finally, the budget provides contract increases for critical services provided by the Child Care Resource & Referral Network and Infant Toddler Resource Centers, including a small expansion of the Infant Toddler Mental Health Consultant program with enhanced data tracking.

Even with these expansions, our state can’t survive on bright spots amid deserts. **We need sustained investment in children, families, and the child care workforce that were not delivered in this year’s budget.** Overall, we are deeply disappointed in this budget on behalf of the child care workforce, the parents who will have to leave the workforce (or New York State entirely), and the children who will miss out on high quality care and early education.