

Winning Beginning NY
Testimony before the Senate Standing Committee on Children and Families
Challenges facing the Childcare Community in New York State in 2011
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We are submitting this testimony today on behalf of *Winning Beginning NY (WBNY)*, the State's early care and learning coalition. With more than 200 members statewide, *WBNY* works to inform policymakers and the public about the many benefits of early care and learning for children from the prenatal period to age eight. The coalition supports an early childhood system built on three goals: early learning, healthy children, and strong families. Our issues include home visiting, child care, Pre-K/K, Early Intervention, and afterschool. While our remarks today focus on child care, we are sure we don't need to remind you that education in general, and early education in particular, can only be successful if there is a continuum of care and all of the intersects along that continuum are strong.

Child care is an essential component of a working family's life. This is the setting in which, starting in infancy, many children spend more than 10 hours a day. High-quality programs provide a foundation for later success in school and in life. But without subsidy assistance, low-income working families must make choices about child care services that could put their children at risk.

New York State has the capacity to provide child care subsidies for 128,000 low-income children from working families and families receiving public assistance. However, cuts to the New York State Child Care Block Grant (NYSCCBG) and the elimination of the federal TANF Emergency Contingency Fund have impacted the ability of these families to work and to provide high-quality care for their children. Waiting lists are increasing, counties are being forced to lower income eligibility levels and co-pays for care are being raised. This is problematic not only for our children and their parents, but for our State's economic recovery. Simply stated, if parents can't work because they don't have child care, our economy will never rebound. In our 2012 Executive Agenda, we urge the State to restore \$37 million in funding for child care subsidies.

However, patching the holes is no longer enough. New York State must make a commitment to develop a comprehensive plan to not only restore the expected loss of federal funding but also to establish a long-term funding stream for child care. Such a plan will assure low-income working families that their children will be cared for while they work.

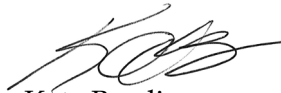
To that end, we ask that the State increase the total of all child care funding by 10%. The use of the word "increase" may be a misnomer, since New York State currently makes only the minimum investment possible in child care funding. A genuine State investment could build a larger and more stable system (less dependent on diminishing federal funds), just as yearly investments in Pre-K have done.

In addition, New York State should explore setting consistent statewide standards for eligibility, co-pays and provider reimbursement rates. The Empire Justice Center's 2010 report, *Mending the Patchwork*, concluded that "across the State there is no relationship between personal income

and costs for housing or child care and the co-payments that social services districts charge working poor families for child care.” The bottom line? Eligibility and fees should not be determined county by county. This current practice is patently unfair and does families a grave injustice.

Finally, New York State showed its commitment to early education by applying for a federal Early Learning Challenge Grant. Our proposal included as its cornerstone implementation of QUALITYstarsNY (QSNY), a rating and improvement system that will raise the quality of programs, provide professional development opportunities, and allow parents to make informed decisions about their child’s care and education. QSNY has been piloted in 13 communities and the State plans to use Race to the Top funds to bring it to certain low-performing school districts. This is encouraging and exciting. However, we cannot continue to depend on federal funds or fund pilots that don’t go to scale. New York State—with or without an Early Learning Challenge Grant—must invest in QSNY and start the long-term implementation process. In our 2012 Executive Agenda, we requested \$20 million—a down payment on a system that will require \$100 million to be successful.

Thank you for your time and for your interest in early care and learning. Child care is imperative both to ensure a winning beginning for children across the state and to aid our economic recovery. We appreciate your commitment to the issue.



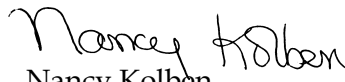
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