



## Testimony of Learning Care Group

### Joint Legislative Hearing on Human Services

February 5, 2026

Chairpersons and Honorable Members of the Senate and Assembly:

On behalf of Learning Care Group, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Executive Budget proposals affecting early childhood education and child care. This budget makes meaningful progress on family affordability and accessibility to high-quality child care and preschool in settings that best meets the needs of a family.

Learning Care is among the largest providers of high-quality early childhood education in the nation. In New York State, our 55 early childhood education centers operate as Childtime Learning Centers, Everbrook Academy, and Tutor Time Learning Centers, with the combined capacity to serve more than 7,000 children and employ over 1,300 educators and school staff. We serve families across a range of financial means, with almost 30% of enrolled children attending through the support of the child care assistance program. We are also proud to partner with more than a dozen school districts to offer New York's Universal Pre-K program in a community-based setting.

### Support for Increased Funding for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

Learning Care strongly supports the Governor's proposal to invest an additional \$1.23 billion in the Child Care Assistance Program, which serves families earning up to 85 percent of the state median income. Nearly 30 percent of families served enrolled in our schools depend on this program to afford quality child care, enabling parents to work, attend school, and contribute to the state's economy.

Despite recent investments, many counties have closed enrollment and established waitlists, turning away otherwise-eligible families. In some cases, counties have been forced to end critical child care assistance to currently-enrolled children at renewal or recertification periods due to insufficient funding. This leaves families without reliable care and providers without stable enrollment.

These disruptions have real consequences: parents may be forced to leave the workforce, providers lose revenue required to retain staff, and businesses without talent needed to thrive. Continued and sustained state investment in CCAP is essential to ensure eligible working families can consistently access child care without interruption.

### Support for Universal Prekindergarten Investment, Expansion, and Stability

Learning Care supports the Governor's commitment to expanding full-day universal prekindergarten for four-year-olds statewide by the 2028–2029 school year. We also commend the proposed increase in per-pupil funding to the greater of \$10,000 or a district's Foundation Aid rate, which more accurately reflects the true cost of delivering high-quality early childhood education and helps address long-standing underfunding in many communities.

For this investment to achieve its intended impact, it is critical that New York preserve and strengthen its long-standing mixed-delivery model, which includes both school districts and private, community-based providers. Mixed delivery has been essential to expanding access efficiently, meeting diverse local needs, and leveraging existing early education capacity statewide. Private providers already operate high-quality prekindergarten programs, employ trained early childhood educators, and maintain facilities designed specifically for young children. Just as importantly, they serve families who rely on full-day, year-round care and continuity of services from birth through age five, and extended-hour and summer care for children up to age 12.

An increase and predictable program funding Universal Prekindergarten Aid is also essential to program stability. Timely and administratively workable funding must flow to all eligible providers, including nonpublic programs operating under contract with school districts. Expansions that rely solely on district-operated classrooms risks exacerbating existing capacity and workforce shortages and limiting families' access to care that meets their needs.

In New York City in particular, we urge the State to encourage the re-opening of the 3K and Pre-K request for proposal to allow additional community-based providers to participate, including those who may have opened or expanded in the several years since this process was open to providers. Many experienced providers have lost enrollment as programs have expanded only in District- run programs nearby. As a result, many community-based providers who are interested in participating struggle to remain viable despite having available space, trained staff, high-quality and strong community ties. Re-engaging these providers is critical to meeting demand, stabilizing the workforce, and preserving parental choice.

As universal prekindergarten expands, it is essential that all related funding streams and programmatic decisions explicitly support mixed delivery. Excluding private and community-based providers would reduce available seats, disrupt existing child care arrangements, and undermine access for working families who depend on full-day, year-round programs.

### **Office of Child Care and Early Education**

The creation of the Office of Child Care and Early Education within the Office of Children and Family Services follows the lead of other states that have successfully streamlined administration of complex and overlapping child care programs and requirements. A dedicated office will improve coordination across early learning programs, reduce administrative complexity for families and providers, and strengthen alignment within the state's early childhood system.

Learning Care supports the Governor's early childhood proposals and shares the Administration's goal of expanding access to high-quality early learning. To achieve that goal, we respectfully urge the Legislature to preserve and strengthen mixed delivery as universal prekindergarten expands, including the continued participation of private and community-based providers. We also encourage lawmakers to maintain strong and sustained support for CCAP so eligible low-income families can reliably access care. Learning Care stands ready to work with the Legislature and the Administration to ensure New York's early care and education system remains stable, inclusive, and responsive to families' needs.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Learning Care Group