

**Testimony in Support of Full Funding of Universal Child Care Programs  
in New York State**

**For the hearing of the  
Joint Budget and Legislative Committees**

**Submitted to the  
Human Services Committee**

February 5, 2026

Dear Chairwoman Senator Liz Krueger, Chairwoman Assemblymember Helene E. Weinstein, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Rebecca Bailin and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers United for Child Care.

New Yorkers United for Child Care is a grassroots organization of parents and would-be parents fighting for free universal child care for every child in New York. We formed in 2023 in response to a series of budget cuts from then-Mayor Eric Adams that devastated 3-K programs in New York City, threatened Pre-K, and forced thousands of families onto waitlists for care that they had been promised.

In response, parents organized. We built a movement that beat back those cuts, secured \$167 million in baselined funding to protect and expand early childhood programs, won a historic \$10 million pilot program to provide hundreds of free, non-means-tested seats to children two and under in New York City, and this year, secured a historic commitment from both Governor Hochul and Mayor Mamdani to put New York on the pathway to truly universal child care.

We are proud of what we've won. But the job is far from done - and we have no time to waste.

New York's child care costs are among the highest in the country. Parents in New York collectively spend more than \$14 billion on child care annually. In New York City, the average annual cost of care for a 2-year-old is \$23,000. A family would need to earn at least \$334,000 a year just to meet the federal standard for affordable care. For most families, child care is their single largest monthly expense - more than rent, college tuition, or a mortgage.

These costs are not just a burden on individual families. They are dragging down New York's economy. New York City alone lost an estimated \$23 billion in economic activity in 2022 because parents - overwhelmingly mothers - have been forced to leave the workforce or reduce their hours given the cost and scarcity of affordable care. Families with children under six are 40% more likely to leave New York State than other households. Families aren't leaving because they want to - they're leaving because they're forced to.

If we don't act, we won't just force more families to rack up debt and forgo essentials like retirement savings or college funds. We will see people choosing not to have children at all - or leaving New York altogether to build their families somewhere else. That is a crisis not just for parents, but for our state's future.

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We are encouraged that Governor Hochul heard the demands of parents and responded with a plan to significantly expand child care access, including state investment in 2-Care in New York City and a pathway toward universal Pre-K statewide. This is a momentous step forward. If fully implemented, it would begin to transform child care from a private burden into a public good - and save families billions of dollars.

But bold as it is, the Governor's plan still falls short of what families need. It lacks several critical commitments that are fundamental to building a child care system that lasts:

- **First, there is no statewide guarantee for Pre-K.** While the plan invests in Pre-K expansion, it does not include a mandate requiring school districts to offer it. Without that requirement, we risk continuing the patchwork system we have today - where access depends on your zip code, not your need. That's exactly what has happened for the past 30 years. The State Legislature first committed to universal Pre-K in 1997. Yet today, outside of New York City, 36% of four-year-olds still cannot access free Pre-K. Approximately 50 school districts across the state offer no Pre-K at all. Investment without a mandate has never delivered universal access, and it won't now.
- **Second, there is no plan for 3-K statewide.** The Governor's proposal is silent on three-year-olds outside of New York City. That leaves an unacceptable status quo, where 96% of three-year-olds in the rest of the state lack access to publicly funded preschool. These families are entirely on their own - paying out of pocket, cobbling together informal care, or leaving the workforce altogether. A universal child care system cannot skip an entire year of early childhood.
- **Third, there is no dedicated revenue.** Governor Hochul has not outlined any new revenue options to fund these programs beyond the next two years. Without permanent, progressive, dedicated funding, these commitments are temporary - and parents have seen temporary commitments evaporate before.

New Yorkers United for Child Care has outlined a number of revenue options that could fund universal child care for the long term:

- Increases to capital gains taxes, which could raise \$12.5 billion annually;
- Corporate tax increases, which could raise \$7 billion;
- A tax on New York's highest earners, which could raise \$20 billion.

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At a time when the federal tax cuts handed New York's wealthiest residents billions in savings, it is not too much to ask that they contribute to a system that benefits every family in the state. Parents cannot be left on the hook when the two-year funding window closes.

New York has the chance to be a national leader on child care. Already, our movement has inspired other states and cities to act. San Francisco and Los Angeles, among others, are exploring universal child care programs modeled on the progress we've made here. But to lead, we have to do it right.

That means passing a true statewide mandate for Pre-K and 3-K, funding providers at rates that reflect the true cost of quality care, and dedicating permanent, progressive revenue so that families can count on this system - not just for the next two years, but for the next generation. We urge legislators to finish the job.