

Advancing Equity for Our Youngest New Yorkers: 2021 Policy Priorities

In New York State, many communities, particularly communities that have been historically underserved, lack access to high-quality, affordable child care for infants and toddlers. In addition, providers often rely on an unsustainable business model that results in low wages that are not reflective of the essential service that child care provides to parents, families, and our economy. In a recent statewide poll, a majority of New York State businesses reported that the lack of access to high-quality child care for infants and toddlers negatively impacted their business, something that underscores the importance of high-quality child care to New York's long-term economic recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed New York's long tenuous child care system to the brink, increased financial instability for infants and toddlers and their families, and demonstrated the impact that proven support programs have on the development of our youngest children. Here are four ways that state leaders can advance equity for the youngest New Yorkers:

1

Efficiently and effectively target remaining CARES Act and other federal pandemic relief for infant and toddler child care

Federal funding should prioritize infant and toddler child care subsidies for communities hit hardest by the impacts of the pandemic, including communities of color, low-income, and immigrant communities. Federal funds should be used to expand access to high-quality child care and provide financial stability to providers, which will ensure that existing capacity for infants and toddlers is maintained in the short term and expands as the economy recovers.

2

Adopt recommendations from the Child Care Availability Task Force

While it will take years to achieve universal access to high-quality child care, concrete steps should be taken toward this goal starting this year. Governor Cuomo's State of the State proposal to limit co-pays for families from low-income backgrounds and to directly address "child care deserts" represent promising developments that improve equity and expand child care access. Federal funding presents an opportunity for other investments to improve access to high-quality child care, including the expansion of QUALITYstarsNY.

3

Address child poverty

Financial stability can help reduce the devastating effects of chronic stress on families with young children. Last year's Executive Budget proposed an expansion of the Empire State Child Credit to include children under 4 years old and would help address child poverty by offering relief to the families of the youngest New Yorkers. In addition, pending before the Senate and Assembly is a bill (S.2775/A.1160) that would commit the state to reducing child poverty in half by 2030, with requirements for specific steps to reach that goal.

4

Invest in proven programs

The first three years of a child's life are a critical time for their lifelong development. Policymakers should increase resources, alignment, and coordination for Early Intervention (EI) and Preschool Special Education programs to ensure that families have access to all the support they need during a formative period in a child's life. Furthermore, the state should move forward with Medicaid investments in home visiting and other "First 1,000 Days" initiatives.