



New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council
Public Hearing April 25, 2017
Testimony from Jane Brown
Child Care Resources of Rockland

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My Name is Jane Brown and I am the Executive Director of Child Care Resources of Rockland Inc. It is my understanding that this public hearing is to provide an opportunity to share our thoughts on improving the quality of and accessibility to early childhood programs in New York and comment on specific areas of the Social Services Law 483-g referencing the Early Childhood Advisory Council.

You asked us to consider speaking on opportunities and barriers to collaboration and coordination: From my perspective there is very little collaboration and coordination, at least as it affects the early childhood industry in Rockland County. In New York we have a splintered system where there are several agencies, grassroots organizations, governmental departments and individuals working toward a similar goal, but often with differing messages. This seems to cause confusion for the very people we want to influence on behalf of children.

Suggestion: We need an actual state Office of Early Childhood that only thinks about children: early learning, foster care, mental health, physical health, special needs, abuse, neglect and trauma at all ages from prenatal through age 8 or 12. Services that serve our youngest children are critically lacking. For instance, in Rockland County, we have virtually no services for children under 5 years who suffer trauma or are not eligible for early intervention or preschool special education but have severe issues of depression or PTSD.

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You asked us to consider how to increase the overall participation of children in existing child care and early childhood education programs including underrepresented populations: First off, there has to be a *better investment for children*. Yes, I have heard that there is “a lot” of money invested in young children. Then why are so few served? If we do not help children start and stay at a quality early childhood program, they will not learn healthy social interactions or acceptable ways to react to their emotions. This is the best solution to reduce and eradicate juvenile crime

Prekindergarten for the last 3 budget cycles (2015, 2016 and 2017) has been open only to school districts with high needs. Could we not open it to children with high needs within all school districts?

Early childhood programs, that have served children since *Universal Prekindergarten* started 20 years ago, are still receiving the same amount of money as when they started: for some that is only \$2,700 per child for 10 months. If we do not get these prekindergarten programs under control with appropriate funds, consistent guidance and policy, they will implode. Several have closed already in Rockland County, which is one of the few counties in the state where every school district has one or more of the state prekindergarten programs. Part of the issue in Rockland is the increase in funds and programming in New York City. That is where our certified teachers are going in order to getting a decent wage and benefits. That is NOT collaboration and coordination.

Facilitated Enrollment for child care assistance is available to only a very few communities in New York State. Many of us in the industry are consistently assisting families with how to apply for child care assistance, but we do not receive any compensation for the work.

You asked us to consider establishing a unified data collection system for public early childhood education and development programs and services: ASPIRE is a great start but there have been several glitches, particularly when we consider the interaction with the EIP portal along with the trainer credential roll-out and requirements. It would be better to get the kinks worked out of the

systems before implementing so that the field would better respect the process and be more apt to use it. Data is all well and good but can we first get the systems in order so the data collected is worthwhile and useful? Data about children's needs would be very helpful. For instance do we know the number of children who are receiving combined support funds for special needs, prekindergarten, Head Start and child care subsidy - all at the same time? Some communities blend funding very well and children may receive services for 10 hour days using funds from all these pots. Some communities do not have the guidance to provide such services or receive guidance that prohibits the ability to do such blending, and so they segregate children into funding streams, causing their days to be inconsistent and in programs of lower quality.

You also asked us to consider professional development and career advancement for early childhood educators: Implementing the Pyramid Model in New York is a great start. The training is good but the roll out has been tenuous. Again, something started without a full picture of how, when, where or for whom the training will be provided. However, in general, the quality of professional development is certainly decreasing when more and more teachers are receiving their training through on-line courses that they can repeat every two years and still receive the "credit" they need for licensing. We have set up a system of mandates for training that causes early educators to just take what they need and be done with it; not engage in professional development that is low-cost, high quality, interactive and on-going so they think they are professionals and are being treated like professionals, not babysitters who can sit through a video, sleep and then pass a test.

Sure VOICE was given funds to help pay and even enter into contracts with other agencies to be paid for training. Those contracts were available in January 2017 and ended in March 2017. The agencies barely knew about it before it was over.

You asked us to consider engaging business and civic leaders and organizations in early learning planning and advocacy at the state and local level and increasing public-private investments. I do that myself with members of our Rockland Children's Advocacy Network with guidance from the Early Care and Learning Council and Winning Beginning, but not ECAC.

In today's economy, when having both parents in the workforce is an economic necessity for many families, we need affordable, high-quality early childhood opportunities more than ever. It's not a nice-to-have – it's a must-have. So it's time we stop treating early childhood care and education as a side issue, or as a women's issue, and treat it like the national economic priority that it is for all of us.

Why can't our industry, particularly if the ECAC is supposed to by law provide the leadership, better influence our government officials to understand the magnitude of how policies and funding affect children. Thinking that our government officials know the facts, I was completely speechless and totally devastated by the outcome of the 2017 NYS budget for children.

I would like to offer some suggestions:

1. Invest in the New York State workforce and human capital by paying for it while children are young. As James Heckman, Nobel Prize winning economist has discovered, there is as much as a \$17 earned to every \$1 spent on early childhood education. Fight Crime Invest in Kids, our colleagues in law enforcement, say "Quality early education readies kids to learn, reinforces respect and responsibility for other and reduces behavior problems that can spiral out of control."
2. Invest funds into tuition assistance programs to equate to scholarships for young children such as is provided for college bound students so that children can have access to quality education when their

parents are at their lower earning years. Or how about free tuition for all, to equate with the new tuition-free college for New York freshmen.

3. Invest in the QUALITYstarsNY system. What good is any facility if it is not of high quality?
4. Re-evaluate the funding allocations for Universal Pre-kindergarten. The districts that receive the mere \$2,700 per child have found many of the community based organizations cannot afford to continue to provide the UPK services...they are losing too much money. This review of the funds for UPK could then include:
 - allocating funds for an eight hour UPK day vs. the 2.5 hours or even the 5 hour “full day”
 - re-opening UPK to all districts across the state that have not yet had the opportunity to start UPK or lost out on the required funding for only high needs school districts
 - transporting children for UPK
 - Study how funds are blended and are they double-used, which might show that funding could be used to serve more children.
5. Change the compulsory age to five years (or even three or four years) for public school. Provide funds for full day kindergarten. Local example: I will never forget the mother of the enrolling kindergarten child as they walked down the hall for the kindergarten screening. This is in a Rockland district that has full day kindergarten for children who were considered “at risk” and half day kindergarten for everyone else. The mom said, “Remember, you do not know the color green”. Hence, she wanted her daughter to learn to manipulate her way into full day Kindergarten.

Our children and youth are facing serious problems. Many are living in poverty. Far too many drop out of school. Hundreds still go without health insurance. Sixteen and 17 year olds convicted of crime, hence the change in the raise to age law, would not have to be in the forefront of our discussion if they all had the opportunity for early learning. Every day children are dealing with unsafe neighborhoods and schools. These problems need to be addressed not increased. I want solutions.

Children need our help **NOW** – they cannot wait until the deficit has been recovered, roads have been repaired, bridges have been built, tunnels have been dug, walls have been built, elections have been won, the war against terrorism is over or global warming has been eradicated.