



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

March 25, 2020

David A. Hansell
New York City Administration for Children's Services
150 William Street
New York, New York 10038

Re: Urgent Actions Needed to Support Child Care Workforce

Dear Commissioner Hansell:

As the novel coronavirus 2019 ("COVID-19") continues to spread here in New York and government takes unprecedented actions to protect public health and safety, we write today to urge that New York City take immediate steps to address the concerns of New York City's child care workforce. Many child care programs, recently designated by Governor Cuomo as essential services, remain open for business during this pandemic, providing care to the children of health care professionals, first responders, and other frontline workers.¹ Simply put, our collective success in flattening the curve of this disease and saving lives will depend in no small part on them.

As you know, the overwhelmingly majority of the child care providers who nurture and educate the children of families receiving child care subsidies are women. Most are women of color, and nearly all run their businesses on the slimmest of margins, hardly earning enough in the best of times to ensure the economic security of their own families. Now, in this moment of crisis, they are stepping up to serve their communities across the five boroughs and meet the demand for new child care capacity. But it is critical that they be afforded additional resources, flexibility, and protections to do so, while safeguarding their own health and that of the children in their care.

While significant new funding will be needed to preserve existing child care capacity and mitigate the long-term economic impacts of COVID-19 on this critical workforce, there is more we could be doing now to ensure providers can continue operating and to prevent permanent program closures. To that end, we implore you in your capacity as head of the City's non-contracted child care services to work with your partners in state and local government to undertake the following:

¹ <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-issues-guidance-essential-services-under-new-york-state-pause-executive-order>

- 1. Pay for enrollment:** Commit to keeping publicly-funded programs whole by providing reimbursement for all children’s absences and any program closures due to COVID-19. Should family co-payments for subsidized care be temporarily waived, as we believe this crisis also warrants, reimbursements must be increased so providers do not have to bear those costs. This is imperative to protect New York City’s child care businesses. Indeed, a national survey conducted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children in just the last week found that 30 percent of child care providers could not survive a closure of more than two weeks without public support to cover fixed costs.²
- 2. Connect essential employees to available slots:** Set up a streamlined process for essential employees such as health care, transit, and grocery workers to connect with child care providers, including family child care providers, with available slots. Similarly, ensure an accessible, multilingual system is in place for providers to report openings to relevant entities and to redirect families to other providers in the event of a closing, as appropriate.
- 3. Provide access to treatment and testing:** Child care programs are now formally essential businesses and as such, the child care workforce, along with other frontline workers, should have priority access to testing for COVID-19 and any needed treatment, with no additional expenses incumbent on the child care provider. Additionally, providers should be given guidance and support in determining when and if to close or reopen following a positive COVID-19 case.
- 4. Distribute needed cleaning supplies and food:** Cleaning supplies, including sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizer, bleach, and gloves, should be delivered to or otherwise distributed and made available to child care programs at no cost so providers can maintain adequate sanitation and hygiene in their facilities. Many child care providers are unlikely to be able to afford to pay out of pocket for these necessary supplies, and even if they could, they may be unable to procure them quickly or at a reasonable cost, given the current market.
- 5. Ensure clear communication and guidance:** Provide clear points of contact at the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) to manage questions and offer guidance related to COVID-19. Given that essential workers have an urgent need for care and conditions are constantly evolving, it is more important than ever that information is provided in a timely manner and that providers are able to access that information in their primary language.

² https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/effects_of_coronavirus_on_child_care.final.pdf

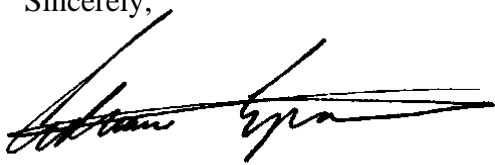
- 6. Offer financial support for extended hours:** Many of the city’s frontline service workers are toiling around the clock to ensure New Yorkers who test positive for COVID-19 have access to treatment and have a need for child care during “non-traditional” hours such as nights and weekends. As outlined in New York City’s child and family services plan, ACS does not currently pay a differential rate above that required by the State for care provided during non-traditional hours.³ ACS should consider increasing the differential payment rate to at least 15 percent to ensure adequate financial compensation for providers now offering extended and non-traditional hours of care.

- 7. Increase reimbursement rates:** Additional compensation should be provided to child care providers who offer subsidized care and remain open during this crisis. Should the federal, state, and local government not otherwise make provisions for hazard pay for essential service workers, child care reimbursement rates should be increased across the board for the duration of the state of emergency.

- 8. Open up access to small business support:** Connect child care providers to small business relief and other funding opportunities as they become available. To the extent possible, the City should ensure eligibility requirements are not barriers for or unnecessarily exclude the thousands of child care providers in New York City who are self-employed. These providers must also be given access to unemployment insurance.

We appreciate that this is a rapidly changing situation and extend our deepest thanks to you and your colleagues for your collective efforts to date to provide guidance to and support the field. We stand ready to assist and to be a resource in any way we can in the days and weeks ahead.

Sincerely,



Adriano Espaillat
U.S. Representative, New York’s 13th
Congressional District



Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller

³ <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/plans/New%20York%20City/New%20York%20City1645.pdf>