



**TESTIMONY**

**OF**

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**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, EDUCATION AND  
YOUTH SERVICES**

**SUBMITTED TO THE**

**NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**AND**

**NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**

**REGARDING THE**

**NEW YORK STATE EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR  
EDUCATION**

**STATE FISCAL YEAR 2012-2013**

**JANUARY 23, 2012**

Good Morning. My name is Moira Flavin, and I am the Policy Associate for Early Childhood Education, Education and Youth Services at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC). CCC is a 68- year old privately supported, independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization, dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce. For 68 years, CCC has undertaken public policy research, community education and advocacy efforts to draw attention to children, youth and families so that we can advance budget, legislative, and policy priorities that are cost-effective and produce better outcomes for New York's youngest residents. I would like to thank Chairman Farrell and Chairman DeFrancisco and members of the Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees for this opportunity to testify on the Governor's Executive Budget for State Fiscal Year 2012-2013.

The recent release of the 2010 Census lays bare the challenges faced by communities throughout New York State. Poverty, and child poverty in particular, has increased as the economic downturn persists.

According to the 2010 Census, New York State's poverty rate has increased from 13.7% in 2007 to 14.9% in 2010. In New York City the poverty rate has increased from 18.5% in 2007 to 20.1% in 2010. Most striking, child poverty is now 21.2% in New York State and 30% in New York City-- meaning that more than 1 out of every 5 children in New York State and 1 out of every 3 New York City children is living in poverty. When looking at individual communities and racial and ethnic groups we find even higher shares of child poverty. In 2010, 33.6% of Latino children in New York State and 39.7% of Latino children in New York City were living in poverty, and 31.7% of Black children in New York State and 31.1% of Black children in New York City lived below the poverty line.

Many New York residents struggled to feed their families, as 3.06 million New Yorkers and 1.8 million New York City residents turned to Food Stamps for help. From 2007-2010, the share of New York City families with children who received Food Stamps increased by 53%, reaching about 30%. Furthermore, according to the 2010 Census, New York's unemployment rate is 9.9% and New York City's rate is 11.2%. On December 9, 2011, an alarming 16,726 New York City children were living in homeless shelters, up from an average daily census of 14,432 just one year ago. Given the staggering number of New York State and New York City families that have faced increased poverty, it is not surprising to see the increased number of families relying on food stamps, the increased number of homeless children and the increased unemployment rate.

While the economic data is sobering, there is some hope when we look at the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). The SPM takes into account benefits that help improve the economic situation of the poor, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Women, Infants and Children (WIC), housing subsidies, school lunch programs, SNAP food stamp benefits and energy assistance programs such as the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP).

While New York State continues to face fiscal challenges, CCC is thankful the Executive Budget proposes to address the state fiscal deficits while protecting against reductions in essential programs for children and families. The Governor's \$132.5 billion Executive Budget proposes to

close a \$3.5 billion gap in SFY 12-13 (and lowers the gap in future years). CCC is appreciative of the Governor and Legislature's proactive work to adopt a tax reform policy that generated \$1.5 billion to help close the gap.

Turning to the State Fiscal Year 2012-2013 Executive Budget proposals for education, our lawmakers need to ensure that they approve of an Adopted Budget that prioritizes providing a sound basic education to New York's next generation of leaders.

### Universal Pre-Kindergarten

CCC is pleased that the Executive Budget proposes to maintain funding for Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK). Preparing 4-year olds for kindergarten is critical for their later academic success. While half-day (2 ½ hours) UPK is beneficial for young children, full day UPK has demonstrated even greater success. We urge the Legislature to negotiate a budget that would allow counties that have achieved a standard of universality for half-day UPK to use the State's funds to expand their programs to full-day UPK for four year olds. For those counties that achieve universality for 4-year olds, we also urge the Legislature to adopt a budget that allows these counties to expand half-day UPK programs for 3-year olds. We also urge you to commit \$53 million to the budget to ensure that UPK becomes truly universal, as the Regents have recommended. Enacting the Regents' Proposal along with funding flexibility will empower school districts throughout the State to create more full-day UPK classes.

### Pre-School Special Education

Pre-school special education costs have been increasing steadily over the past several years, in large part due to increased enrollment. CCC is greatly concerned about the lower reimbursement rates for New York City as outlined in the SFY 12-13 Executive Budget Article VII legislation. The proposal would cut the reimbursement rate for services in New York City from 69.5% to 59.5%, thus shifting the costs to the City.

Statewide, the cost shift to the school districts is also concerning. While the Governor's budget proposal reduces the share municipalities must contribute for any growth above their spending for 2011-2012, the school districts will be forced to contribute more. With pre-school special education costs increasing so dramatically statewide, many districts may not be able to manage this burden, particularly in light of the property tax cap.

Furthermore, we strongly caution that the Governor's proposal to decouple evaluation and special education services might cause hardships for families in need of specialized services or services in a particular language, who have limited options when choosing evaluators and providers. The proposal ignores the fact that there are currently safeguards in place to prevent conflicts of interest around evaluation and service provision. For example, the evaluator's role is to determine eligibility, not the level of services the child shall receive. Currently, the IEP team, with approval from the Committee on Special Education, makes the final decision regarding the level and location of services. Additionally, with regard to the proposal to require justification when a distant provider is chosen over a closer one, CCC feels strongly that the needs of the

children and families should dictate decisions about evaluations and services. For these reasons, CCC urges the Legislature to reject these proposals.

### School Aid Growth

CCC supports the Governor's proposal in the Executive Budget to increase State Aid by 4% in the 2012-2013 school year and 3.5% in the 2013-2014 school year, tying state aid for education to the growth in New York State personal income. We also appreciate the proposal to target the School Aid to high-need school districts.

CCC strongly believes that all children deserve a quality education that prepares them for college and career, and research shows that quality instruction plays a large role. The *New York Times* recently reported on the release of a study by economists at Harvard and Columbia that tracked 2.5 million students over 20 years and showed that elementary- and middle-school teachers who help raise their students' standardized-test scores seem to have a wide-ranging, lasting positive effect on those students' lives beyond academics, including lower teenage-pregnancy rates, greater college matriculation and adult earning<sup>1</sup> Thus, CCC supports efforts to measure teacher effectiveness. We are hopeful that the State Education Department, the teachers' union, and eventually local districts will reach an agreement regarding a teacher evaluation system soon. Our school children should not be penalized for the failure of adult parties to reach consensus. Our students have one chance at an education, and we must not jeopardize that chance.

### Contract for Excellence Program

CCC is pleased that the Executive Budget maintains funding for the Contract for Excellence Program (C4E) so that 23 districts, including the Big Five, will be able to participate. This program provides support for important initiatives related to teacher and principal quality, time on task (which includes supplemental before or after-school activities), middle and high school restructuring, full-day pre-kindergarten, and programming for English language learners. Furthermore, C4E targets this support to high-need students in addition to supporting district-wide initiatives. The funding is important for ensuring that all New York students receive a quality education.

### Competitive Grants

While we appreciate the intent of the competitive grant program, which is to encourage school districts to test innovative approaches to achieving academic gains and management efficiency, we are concerned about the immediate financial needs of schools. Currently, these funds are necessary to retain teacher positions, prevent increases in class size, and improve the quality of instruction in classrooms throughout the state.

### State Assessments and GED Testing

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<sup>1</sup> Big Study Links Good Teaching to Lasting Gains. *The New York Times*. January 6, 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/06/education/big-study-links-good-teachers-to-lasting-gain.html?\\_r=2&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/06/education/big-study-links-good-teachers-to-lasting-gain.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all)

CCC supports the Governor's proposal to add an additional \$700,000 to the GED exam. However, we are concerned that the State will have insufficient resources to cover the rising costs of the exam. For the 2.3 million adults without a high school credential in New York State, half of which live in New York City,<sup>2</sup> the GED is a common postsecondary pathway. Pearson, the for-profit company that partnered with the American Council on Education to turn the Educational Testing Service into a for-profit entity, is set to make changes to the test, in order to align it with the Common Core Standards and to promote college and career readiness. These changes will roughly double the cost to administer the GED. If current budgeted amounts are maintained, as of 2014, only about half of the people who now take the test will be able to sit for it. CCC urges the Legislature to adopt a budget that increases the investment in the GED, thus providing continued access to this important gateway for those who were not successful in a traditional high school setting. CCC also urges the Governor and the Legislature to preserve free access to the GED. Imposing a fee on test takers would create a barrier to the exam, and our goal should be to protect access for New Yorkers who need to take it.

CCC supports the Governor's proposal to add \$7 million to State Assessments. As you are aware, the State Education Department intended to cancel the January Regents during 2011-2012 due to a shortage of funding. Mayor Bloomberg, along with other private donors, contributed private funding to restore the exams statewide. The January Regents are vital tools for many students hoping to graduate on time. Furthermore, the January Regents exam represents an invaluable opportunity for many youth in Transfer Schools, students who have dropped out, and struggling students who did not pass the Regents exam on their first try. Moreover, many students who must support themselves and their families need the earliest possible opportunity to take the Regents so that they can accelerate their entrance into higher education or the workforce. CCC urges the Legislature to adopt a budget with sufficient funding to maintain all the Regents exams, including the January Regents, in order to provide New York students with as many options as possible.

In closing, we ask the Assembly and the Senate to negotiate a budget with the Governor that protects our youngest New Yorkers from paying for this economic downturn for the rest of their lives and helps to bolster the education system throughout the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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<sup>2</sup>According to the 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates (U.S. Census Bureau), there are 2,282,877 adults (age 18 and over) in New York State without a high school credential, and 1,294,508 in New York City.