



**Citizens' Committee
for Children of NEW YORK**

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Committee on Youth Services

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Good afternoon. My name is Daryl Hornick-Becker and I am a Policy and Advocacy Associate at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. CCC is a 76-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that 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. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for New York City's children.

I would like to thank Chair Rose and all the members of the Youth Services committee for holding today's hearing on the city Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget.

In the past year, youth serving community-based organizations across the city have stepped up to bridge the digital divide, help working families, address children's emotional trauma and behavioral health needs, and significantly help to address social isolation and disruption in education during an extremely difficult time. In addition to supporting our youth, summer camps, SYEP, afterschool programs and the Learning Bridges sites have played a significant role in keeping our schools, communities and economy running during the pandemic, and they will be vital to an equitable and lasting recovery.

However, the youth services sector has long experienced inadequate and inconsistent funding, and despite their vital role during the pandemic, youth programs are once again one of the first areas to be cut in the most recent budget proposal. CCC urges the council and administration to not only restore cuts to summer programs and baseline funding, but to make the necessary reforms and investments that will stabilize, support, and expand access to youth programs that serve children and youth throughout the city.

Make no mistake, in light of what New York City's children and youth have experienced this year and the disruptions in their lives that may continue, the City administration and City Council are faced with an incredible opportunity to make robust investments in the youth services continuum – to offer year-round supports commencing this summer, that promote not only good physical health, but importantly supports social emotional health and wellbeing, in addition to addressing profound learning loss. This is an opportunity the City can ill afford to miss, what we do for our children and youth now will inform their immediate and long-term needs for months and years to come. The Executive Budget must make robust investments in year-round youth services, with an emphasis on expanding summer supports, as a core priority.

Restore Summer SONYC funding for 9,500 slots for middle school students, and add and baseline funding for an additional 34,000 slots.

Last year during the height of the pandemic, the administration proposed the total elimination of all summer programs for youth, including SYEP, summer COMPASS and SONYC camps, and summer programs at Beacons and Cornerstones. While CCC was pleased to see partial restorations in the adopted budget - as a result of the hard-fought advocacy of both the Campaign for Children and our champions in the City Council - it is vital that at the very least the city returns to pre-pandemic funding levels for summer programs and build on them to serve more children and youth.

Instead, the FY 2022 Preliminary Budget includes a reduction in summer SONYC programs for middle school students, a \$5.73 million cut that amounts to approximately 9,500 slots, on top of the exclusion of one-time funding of \$20.35 million for 34,000 slots. This means as it currently stands, the budget includes no funding or programming for summer SONYC for middle-schoolers.

Up until late February middle-school students in NYC were attending school entirely remotely, and even as middle-schools open up the vast majority will likely remain learning partially or fully remotely. These students will require the academic engagement and learning loss prevention that summer programs offer. To eliminate them entirely is antithetical to the administration's stated goal of helping students cope and recover from this school year.

Additionally, summer programs help working families by providing child care over the summer, they benefit students physical and social-emotional health, and they will help students safely re-engage after an isolating and difficult school year. Lastly, eliminating summer programming handicaps CBOs who need to hire staff and develop plans to provide afterschool programs for the next school year, and this elimination comes after years of only last-minute and partial restorations for summer programs for middle school students.

It is imperative that the administration not only restores the \$5.73 million in summer SONYC funds well before the adopted budget, but also adds back and baselines funds for an additional 34,000 SONYC spots – for a total restoration of \$25.7 million to fund 43,500 summer SONYC slots. Additionally, the Department of Youth and Community Development should not be caught flat-footed and should issue guidance on how summer programs can be enrolled and operated safely, even before restorations are in the budget.

Families are already asking providers if their children will have the opportunity to attend summer camp this year. It is past time the City removes children and families from the annual budget dance and prioritizes the youth-serving summer programs that have always been vital to children's behavioral health, but this year will also be integral to a recovery.

Invest in the Summer Youth Employment Program to build towards universal access, and enact reforms that expand access and participation.

The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) had reached a peak participation rate in the summer of 2019, with over 74,000 youth employed.¹ However funding was entirely eliminated in the FY 2021 Executive Budget and only partially restored in the Adopted Budget, resulting in just over 35,000 youth served in the summer of 2020.² Although CCC was pleased to see the funding return to pre-pandemic levels for SYEP in the FY 2022 Preliminary Budget, it is important to note that in summer 2019 over 150,000 youth applied to SYEP, and less than half received placement. To truly invest in employment opportunities and career training for young people, the administration and council should not be content with just pre-pandemic funding, but should begin to significantly invest and add spots to SYEP following this summer, with the goal of universal access next summer.

Additionally, the nature of working in the pandemic and the last-minute restorations of SYEP last summer showcased SYEP providers' best practices in terms of flexibility, enrollment, placement, and serving community needs. Since last summer providers have gathered to issue recommendations for programs reforms that would streamline processes and expand access and participation. These recommendations include but are not limited to the following:

- Set aside slots for youth in areas most impacted by COVID-19.
- Maximize time allowed for youth in community-based programs to access and select opportunities by ensuring the application goes live by the agreed-upon date of March 15th.
- Launch a campaign to publicize this year's initiatives and promote outreach within and across agencies (DOE, DOP, DOHS, ACS, NYCHA, etc.) to stimulate application flow and to help build connections across the agencies and providers;
- Allow providers maximum flexibility to enroll young people and leverage available slots to best serve youth;
- Provide flexibility on participant document requirements similar to 2020, and;
- Quickly approve provider program plans for Summer 2021 so they can begin the work of staffing up and finalizing curricula etc.

Furthermore, Teens Take Charge has developed a proposal for *SYEP Unbound*, which would provide self-guided courses and learning opportunities to young people who are not accepted through the lottery process, and we urge the City Council to fund this initiative.

For this summer's program and to ensure equity and access as more SYEP spots are added, the administration and City Council should ensure DYCD pursues these reforms and listens to the providers who run the programs and the youth they serve.

Continue to support Learning Bridges as long as they are needed, and better collaborate across agencies to expedite background clearances for youth program staff.

¹ NYC Dept. of Youth and Community Development. "SYEP 2019 Annual Survey," Retrieved from https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/2019_NYC_SYEP_Annual_Summary.pdf.

² NYC Mayor's Office "Preliminary Mayor's Management Report Fiscal Year 2021: Dept. Of Youth and Community Development," Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2021/dycd.pdf>.

CCC was pleased to see an investment of \$57 million in the current fiscal year for Learning Bridges programs in the FY 2022 Preliminary Budget. We understand these funds and the program itself is set to run through the school year and end at the conclusion of the Fiscal Year on June 30th. However, in addition to funding there are a multitude of ways the administration and DYCD can continue to support CBOs who are running Learning Bridges and afterschool programs, as well as the children and families they serve.

Expanding access to the sites beyond just select feeder schools has worked to increase enrollment, but students who attend charter schools should also be able to access the sites. Additionally, if Learning Bridges will be operational either during the summer for summer school students, or next fall, the earlier these plans can be announced and funds made available, the better equipped providers can be to serve children and youth.

Lastly, even prior the pandemic it was a long and arduous process to have new staff cleared to begin working in afterschool or summer programs, putting providers at a disability in their ability to scale up and serve families. Unfortunately, this has remained true throughout the pandemic, even as CBOs were tasked with operating Regional Enrichment Centers last year and Learning Bridges sites this year. The administration, DYCD, and DOHMH must collaborate better on the clearance process and allow providers to onboard new staff in a timely manner.

Conclusion

As vaccinations efforts ramp up the city can and should craft a bold and comprehensive approach to year-round services for children and youth that begins with a robust approach to summer programming. Children and youth have but one childhood, and the year they have experienced will inform their growth and development, social-emotional health, and their academic achievement for months and years to come. The City administration and City Council have an opportunity to invest in children and youth today – the Executive Budget must prioritize the health, wellbeing and recovery of New York’s children and youth. To do anything less, would be an abdication of responsibility.