Since 1944, Citizens’ Committee for Children (CCC) has served as an 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 and their families.

We would like to thank Chair Stevens and the Committee on Youth Services for hosting this Oversight Hearing on Summer 2022 Programming Readiness. Investing in summer programming is an essential budget item to ensure youth can access opportunities, economic support, networks, and community.

Summer programming is a win-win-win for youth, communities, and the NYC economy. Youth are able to have fun, enjoy their peers’ company, and gain skills in arts, culture, youth development settings or the workplace depending on their summer program of choice. Communities benefit from having youth engaged in pro-social programming during the summer months, and youth wages or per diems help youth, their families, and local businesses.

CCC and our partners were pleased to see the increased investment in jobs and SYEP slots. The budget baselines $79 million in funding for SYEP and summer youth work programs. Businesses and the New York City economy gain workers who often can provide unique contributions based upon their age and experiences, some of whom transition later into full-time employees for the business. Research has shown that SYEP participation leads to higher rates of school attendance and passage of the NYS Regents examinations, and lower rates of mortality and incarceration. SYEP’s success is also demonstrated by the overwhelming demand for and participation in SYEP by New York City youth.

Though the investment in SYEP and youth works program is vital, the Preliminary Budget failed to make additional investments in K-8 summer programming, and there remain areas of programming that must be financed to support the well-being of youth and promote pandemic recovery.

CCC, alongside the Campaign for Children, urges the city to baseline year-long paid programming opportunities, not just SYEP, for all young people. Not only will this provide continued economic support, but it will also provide a sense of community, something that has been lacking since the pandemic. We also want to address the yearly challenge providers face with coordinating summer programming because they have not been informed of the actual number of youths they will serve until late in the spring, sometimes with only a few weeks'
notice. While this has often been due to tremendous investments in summer programming by the City Council come late spring, this has been a challenge for providers as last-minute planning can sometimes sacrifice the quality of the experience. It also means that many youths do not know that they can participate in summer programming until very close to the start date. **For these reasons, baselined year-long funding for all youth programming is long overdue.**

In coordination with partners, providers, and Campaign for Children, we urge city leaders to include the following in the budget as soon as possible, to truly ensure summer readiness.

1. **Fund programs early and adequately yearlong:** All summer programming funding must be baselined to support young participants and staff; as well as so CBOs can properly prepare for summer programming. The Preliminary Budget allocated no new funding for summer programs, such as COMPASS and SONYC. COMPASS, which serves 45,000 students per year, is only set to receive outdated sum of baselined funding. SONYC, a middle school youth program, was not funded in the preliminary budget. In addition to adequately funding and baselining resources, program reimbursement must support competitive salaries and provide increased cost-per-participant rates that are tied to inflation. We urge the City to fund providers at a rate of $1,848 per elementary school student and $959 per middle school student. There must also be clear COVID-19 guidance on procedures and precautions even if mask mandates are ending.

2. **Center summer programming on positive youth development:** Positive youth development, joy, social-emotional learning, mental health support should be the purpose of summer programming, not academic remediation. Play is essential to youth development. While last year’s involvement from DOE teachers and principals was appreciated, this year we hope to see CBOs empowered to take the lead on planning and ensure that programming includes enrichment activities outside of academics.

3. **Strengthen operational practices between CBOs and city agencies to ensure high quality programming, smooth rollout of background checks, and intentional, thoughtful collaboration among the city agencies that have a hand in summer programming.** Each DOE, DYCD, and DOHMH play a unique role in ensuring summer readiness. A coordinated central office must be created in order to ensure that regulatory issues, such as contracting, citing, licensing, staffing, and background check processes, can be managed efficiently. Additionally, CBO and school pairings must be done in a thoughtful and intentional way, and as early in the year as possible. The city must analyze schools and their surrounding communities to determine the local demand and make the best CBO pairing possible. CBOs and schools with existing partnerships should be rematched, and if this does not happen, new pairings must be made as far in advance as possible to truly ensure summer readiness.

4. **Set realistic enrollment targets and improve the enrollment process:** The city must implement a process that is accessible to families to enroll their children into programs.
   a. The enrollment process should be held by the CBOs and be clear and easy for families to follow. To ensure that the enrollment process is accessible, there should be both online and paper applications, as well as multiple language options. Finally, due to the sharing nature of DYCD/DOE, they both must operate off a shared and coordinated enrollment list.
   b. This summer, there must be an enrollment deadline for the program for CBOs to prepare for the number of youths in program. Furthermore, there must be a universal referral process that CBOs can follow in the case that a site is at capacity and the young person must be enrolled at a different site with open seats.
   c. Staff must be compensated during the enrollment process.
5. **Ensure safe and adequate staffing:** Allow for enough time for CBOs to hire and onboard qualified personnel to support summer programming. Additionally, provide increased funding to expand staff capacity to adequately serve the increased number of students that have been slotted for in the preliminary budget.

6. **Improve the fingerprinting and staff clearances process:** In 2019, the Comprehensive Background Check process was implemented and since then, there has been a very delayed turnaround time for background checks for staff working at CBOs in the youth sector. This has led to immense staffing shortages and additional challenges. To remedy this, there must be more early planning as well as an increase in capacity within the city agencies to process the clearances in order to expedite the process.

7. **Support children with Individual Education Plans (IEPs):** Individualized paraprofessionals must be available during summer programming for students with IEPs. It is important that these paraprofessionals are not treated as group leaders who can be counted toward adult staffing ratios, but rather individual aides for children with an IEP.

We are pleased with the expansion of enrollment slots to SYEP, but K-8 summer programs — and issues related to staff expansions, wage increases, and proper training — must also be prioritized in this year’s budget. The employment sector as a whole is experiencing staffing shortages; it is crucial that people are paid a living wage, or else we risk destabilizing the entire structure. Furthermore, providers must be made aware of rate-setting in advance of contracts being administered. Program rates were increased in 2021, but providers are unsure if those rates will remain the same, increase, or return to pre-pandemic rates, which have been stagnant since 2014.

**Conclusion**

Investing in summer programming and baselining funding to create a stable continuum of is essential for the wellbeing of youth and families. Summer programming is a lifeline for youth, provides needed enrichment and or income, and can keep youth safe. Ensuring that summer programming for K-8 youth is funded, well-staffed, organized, coordinated, and safe is a necessity. We cannot underestimate the importance of joy, play, and community for young people, especially as we adapt to a new way of life and hope to recover from the pandemic.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.