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Budget Hearing  
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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 the Budget Hearing on Youth Services. Investing in youth programming is essential to ensuring youth can access opportunities, economic support, networks, and community.

As New York moves towards recovery from the pandemic, youth services and programming are more crucial than ever to help youth restore socioemotional skills that have been lost as a result of COVID-19. Youth programming helps to maintain connections among peers and helps to bridge the gap between families and supports beyond schools. CCC, in partnership with the Campaign for Children, recommends the following investments into youth services to help support the mental health, skill building, and emotional well-being of young New Yorkers.

**Youth Employment Programs**

CCC applauds the Preliminary Budget’s major expansions proposal for summer youth workforce programming, including plans to increase the number of baselined Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) slots from 70,000 to 90,000 and to add an additional $57 million in baselined funding to cover this SYEP slot increase. Increasing slots for SYEP will bring the city closer to a program with universal access. To ensure that this increased funding is used as effectively as possible, the DYCD and the Mayor’s Office of Youth Employment (MOYE) must continue coordinating closely to ensure a successful summer.

While we celebrate this milestone for SYEP, we recognize that Work Learn Grow (WLG), SYEP’s school-year counterpart, has received no baselined investment and is set to receive less than half of its pre-pandemic funding. **We urge the city to invest $20 million to baseline funding for WLG in the FY23 budget to further increase opportunities for young people and maintain relationships and employment.**

**K-8 Summer Programming**

On March 11, Mayor Adams announced a historic expansion to the Summer Rising program, increasing slots by 10,000 for a total of 110,000 K-8 students. CCC applauds this proposed
expansion, which is sure to positively impact the lives of countless young people. That being said, we urge the city to address the severe challenges providers from last year’s Summer Rising programming were forced to face. This includes but is not limited to paying providers a fair wage, addressing staffing shortages, and providing mental health supports for students.

Due to inflation and increased competition in the labor market, the city must further increase funding and rates for CBOs contracted to provide summer programming. DYCD recently announced a $1,414 participant rate for COMPASS contracts and a $1,320 participant rate for SONYC contracts. The COMPASS rate received no increase from last year, and though the SONYC rate was doubled, providers will still be paid flat wages once increased enrollment and extended work hours are factored in. We urge the city to further increase the cost-per-participant rates to $1,848 for COMPASS contracts and $1,410 for SONYC contracts. These rates would ensure that all summer staff would be paid at least $21 an hour, taking into consideration a student-to-counselor ratio of 10:1 and that middle school summer counselors will now be working 300 hours throughout the summer. These rates also fall in line with the #JustPay campaign for human service workers. These increased rates will help to address the immense summer staffing shortage and to stabilize the youth development workforce.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the mental health of young people. Middle school-age children especially are experiencing high levels of depression and anxiety. This year’s Summer Rising funding must also budget for social workers, crisis intervention, and other resources, providing CBOs the ability to focus solely on the well-being of their participants.

Address the Backlog of Comprehensive Background Checks for Youth Programs

Providers of youth services wholly rely on government partners to process background checks efficiently and promptly, but DOHMH is failing to do that. As a result, countless after-school and summer staff are unable to start work due to pending clearances, and many CBOs have been forced to shut down programming entirely. This further contributes to staffing shortages, as people waiting for their background checks to clear are forced to find work elsewhere that can pay them sooner. These issues negatively impact the children and youth who attend after-school and summer programs throughout the city, as well as their parents who are unable to find steady and reliable child care. The city must prioritize the backlog of background checks and develop a new simplified system that will quickly and effectively clear staff to work with youth. Otherwise, young people and the providers that serve them, will continue paying the price of complex bureaucratic processes.

Invest in Community Schools

Community schools play an integral role in youth development as well as family and community engagement. Schools partner with CBOs to run community schools that address socioeconomic, health, and mental hygiene needs of both youth and families, covering the wide range of issues
on the education spectrum. The state Education Department recommended the utilization of community schools in its reopening guidance, and New York City has leaned heavily on federal relief funds to expand the number of local community schools. That being said, there is still no long-term strategy in place to sustain funding for community schools and no baseline funding has been issued by the city.

CCC asks the city to prioritize community schools by developing a long-term strategy that includes baselined funding to ensure that community schools are able to continue offering a wide array of services to youth and families well after federal funding subsides. Community schools are needed to support academics, enrichment, restorative justice, and mental well-being. City level investments into community schools will further support community wellness, minimized criminalization, and youth development.

Support the #JustPay Campaign and Fund a Cost-of-Living Adjustment for Human Service Workers

The human services workforce in New York City has some of the lowest paid workers in the city’s economy. Human service employees provide the backbone for essential services for children and families. Without their hard work, millions of New Yorkers would be living in crisis. CCC was disappointed by the lack of investments in the human services workforce within the Preliminary Budget. We support the #JustPay Campaign, which calls for a living wage and annual cost of living adjustments for social service providers. We urge the city to enact a budget that adheres to the asks of the #JustPay Campaign:

1. Establish, fund, and enforce an automatic annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) on all human services contracts;
2. Set a living wage floor of no less than $21 an hour for all city and state funded human services workers; and
3. Create, fund, and incorporate a comprehensive wage and benefit schedule for government contracted human services workers comparable to the salaries made by city and state employees in the same field.

As youth programming faces a serious staffing shortage, actions to raise the wages of summer, after-school, and year-round contracted staff are crucial.

Conclusion

Investing in youth programming through baselined funding, mental health supports, and equal pay for workers is essential for the well-being of youth, families, and communities. Youth programming can be a lifeline, as it provides needed enrichment, income, socialization, and health support. Ensuring that youth programming 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.