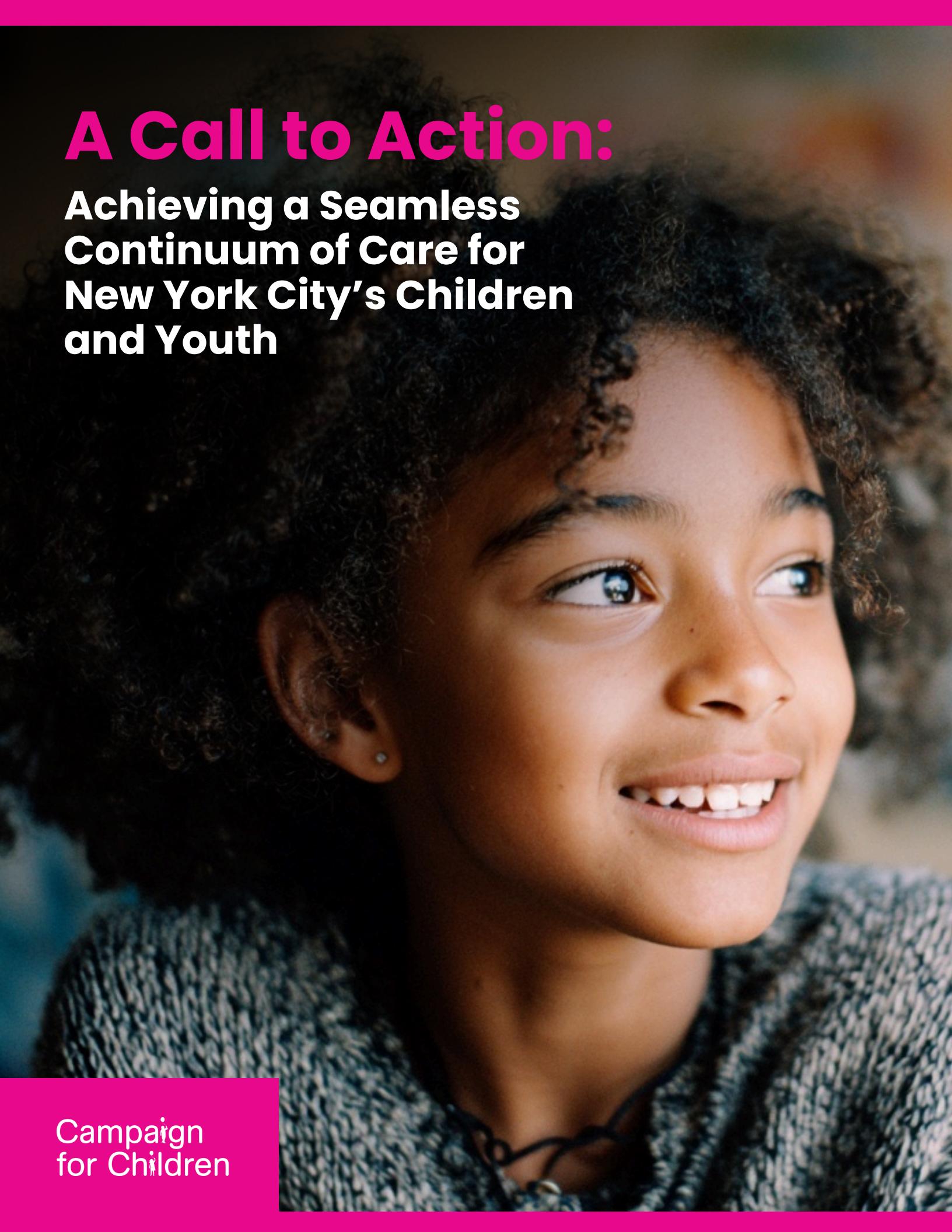


A Call to Action:

**Achieving a Seamless
Continuum of Care for
New York City's Children
and Youth**



Campaign
for Children

Letter from the Coalition

The Campaign for Children (C4C) is a coalition of more than 150 early childhood and youth service providers, parents, and advocates – representing hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers via a continuum of care from birth through early childhood, and youth enrichment. Formed in 2011 to protect New York City's early childhood education and youth service systems from severe budget cuts, C4C has grown into a leading voice for children, families, and the community-based providers who serve them. Over the past decade, C4C has successfully:

- Advocated for state funding that made universal Pre-K possible
- Advocated for the restoration and baselining of city funding for middle school afterschool and summer programs
- Partnered with city leaders to establish a multi-year investment and path to salary parity for the early childhood education workforce
- Advocated for the reform of city contract terms and practices to improve the quality and sustainability of services, including increased rates in Birth to Five and COMPASS RFPs
- Fought to reverse proposed cuts to 3-K and advocated to restore and baseline critical early care and education investments.

We are thrilled to see the incoming Mamdani Administration, City Council members, state legislators, and fellow advocates uplift universal access to child care as a top priority for improving affordability and quality of life for all New Yorkers. The Campaign for Children supports the creation of a truly universal child care system that includes birth to five, as well as out-of-school time services for 3k to 12th grade. We also recognize the need to prioritize fixing barriers in the existing service delivery system (i.e., paying providers promptly for services rendered, increasing wages for staff, and improving the contracting process), which will support Community Based Organizations' (CBOs) efforts to provide high-quality services and supports to children and youth. Universal access cannot be attained without resolving the current issues in the system.

As city leaders seek solutions to the affordability crisis, the Campaign for Children **calls on the incoming administration to implement key policy changes** to ensure that early education, child care, and youth enrichment services are adequately funded, accessible, and integrated into broader affordability and economic development efforts. This continuum of care is not a luxury; it is a critical strategy that forms the foundation of a young person's social and academic development and enables working families to balance employment and caregiving responsibilities. The following proposed investments in early childhood and youth services will support the broader economy by ensuring families can earn, spend, and contribute to the vitality of New York City.

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I. The Case for Investing in a Seamless Continuum of Care

As city leaders seek solutions to the affordability and education crises, the Administration must ensure that early education, child care, and youth enrichment services are adequately funded, accessible, and integrated into broader affordability and economic development efforts. This continuum of care is not a luxury; it is a **critical strategy** that:

1. Relieves financial pressure on families, allowing them to balance employment and caregiving responsibilities.
2. Forms the foundation of a young person's social-emotional and academic development, narrowing achievement gaps.
3. Strengthens the broader economy by ensuring families can earn, spend, and contribute to the vitality of New York City.

1. Relieving Financial Pressure on Families:

New York City has long been grappling with an affordability crisis, as the cost of living continues to sharply outpace wage growth. In 2025, the citywide median rent reached \$3,491 a month (or \$41,892 annually), representing 55% of the median household income of \$77,000. The rent burden is even higher in parts of the city with greater economic need, with Bronx residents spending an average of 81.6% of their income on rent.¹



For families, the cost of child care poses another significant expense. Market-rate family-based care and center-based childcare now cost an average of \$18,200 and \$26,000 annually, respectively, representing a 43 percent increase since 2019.² At these rates, families are spending up to 63 percent of their annual income on childcare and afterschool programs, and roughly eighty percent of families citywide cannot afford childcare.³ For families with multiple children, these pressures multiply, creating extreme financial strain as high housing costs collide with multiple childcare needs.

As a result, more families are being priced out of the city altogether. Over the past decade, the number of New York City households with three or more children has declined by nearly 17 percent.⁴ When departing families were asked in a survey issued by New York City Public Schools why they are leaving the city, among the top five reasons cited were “a better environment to raise kids,” “more housing space,” and “cheaper housing options” (representing 64%, 50% and 36% of respondents, respectively).⁵

Against this backdrop, access to affordable childcare and youth programs has never been more critical. For families already burdened by high housing and living costs, reliable, high-quality care is not a luxury—it is essential infrastructure that enables parents to remain in the workforce and pursue long-term economic stability.

2. Addressing Inequitable Educational Outcomes:

We know that our city’s public education system faces persistent challenges in ensuring equitable outcomes for students in low-income communities and communities of color. A 2023 report from the

Over the past decade, the number of New York City households with three or more children has declined by nearly 17 percent.

Independent Budget Office (IBO) found significant disparities in ELA and Math performance across almost all demographic measures, including neighborhood poverty level, race and ethnicity, housing status, English language learner status, and disability status. Only 37% of NYCPS students in high-poverty neighborhoods demonstrated proficiency in English Language Arts and 34% in Math, a staggering twenty points below the proficiency rates of peers in higher-income areas.⁶

While the city directs more resources to schools serving students of greater need via the fair student funding (FSF) formula, academic data suggest that investments in school-age and school-day programming alone are insufficient to close achievement gaps. We know that programming beyond the traditional K-12 system— including early childhood education, after school, and summer school programs – can significantly boost students’ academic readiness and achieve equitable outcomes.

Child care issues can cause New York City businesses to lose \$1.2 billion annually.

3. Strengthening the Economy:

This lack of affordable care creates profound income losses both at the individual level and at the city level. Two-thirds of working parents with young children report experiencing regular work absences or disruptions due to child care problems, and, across a twelve-month period, about 10% of working parents reported that child care issues led to job turnover. The Robin Hood Foundation estimates that job absences and turnover caused by child care issues can cause New York City businesses to lose \$1.2 billion annually and contribute to over \$138 million in lost city and state tax revenue.⁷ When considering the full

economic impact of families changing careers due to childcare issues, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) estimated the cost to be \$23 billion in 2022 alone.⁸ Investing in affordable and accessible childcare offers a significant return on investment, as it allows families to earn, spend, and contribute to the vitality of New York City. childcare offers a significant return on investment, as it allows families to earn, spend, and contribute to the vitality of New York City.

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II. Meeting the Moment: Understanding Gaps in the Current System

New York City has made progress in building a continuum of care for children and families through a range of public programs managed primarily by New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). The programs overseen by each respective agency are as follows:

- **NYCPS:** Pre-K, 3-K, and subsidized childcare
- **DYCD:** COMPASS, SONYC, SYEP, Summer Rising (co-managed by NYCPS), and more
- **ACS:** Childcare vouchers

While each of these programs is managed by one or more city agencies, community-based organizations are the overlooked infrastructure that enable service delivery. And yet, significant gaps remain in ensuring that community-based organizations have the necessary resources to serve all families, including:

1. Insufficient and inaccessible programming
2. Strains on Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)
3. An underpaid and underdeveloped workforce

1. Insufficient and Inaccessible Programming:

Demand for early childhood and afterschool programs far exceeds available capacity. Currently, only 24% of New Yorkers under five years old benefit from public childcare like Pre-K and 3-K for All or childcare subsidies.⁹ There are also not nearly enough after-school program slots available to children and youth across New York City.



According to a recent comptroller report, the city faces a gap of 392,000 after school seats to match need, despite recent investments made by the Adams's Administration.¹⁰

Further, too many program models remain inaccessible to children, including those with disabilities. In May 2025, the New York City Department of Education testified that significant numbers of preschoolers with disabilities were not receiving their legally mandated services and that hundreds still lacked placements in special education classes — including 616 preschoolers waiting for seats in special education classes and 7,156 preschoolers missing one or more mandated services.¹¹ While NYCPS has committed substantial resources — including \$70 million in the FY2026 adopted budget for additional service providers and evaluations for preschool special education — the actual impact of these investments on expanding access and reducing service delays remains unclear.

Students with disabilities also have limited access to afterschool programs, in part due to insufficient funding for afterschool programs in District 75 schools. Lack of transportation to after school programs is an additional barrier for all children and youth, but disproportionately impacts students with IEP-mandated school bus transportation. Meeting families' needs for accessible and affordable early childhood programs for children ages zero to four, along with high-quality out-of-school time (OST) programs for PK-12 youth, requires intentional capacity building and strategic program expansion.

2. Strains on Community-Based Organizations:

CBOs face perilous operating conditions that threaten their ability to serve families, including chronically underfunded contracts, restrictive procurement and fiscal policies, inefficient data sharing systems, and other administrative barriers. These challenges limit CBOs' capacity to sustain and expand high-quality programs, leaving families with disparate access to essential programs.

Many city contracts fail to cover the true cost of service delivery, forcing CBOs to subsidize public programs with private fundraising. For example, current COMPASS contracts only cover roughly sixty percent of the true cost of program delivery, requiring the organization to continuously seek philanthropic support simply to maintain existing services.¹² This funding gap creates financial instability, limits long-term planning, and discourages program expansion—particularly in high-need communities where private fundraising is most difficult.

Restrictive procurement and fiscal policies further exacerbate these challenges. CBOs are often required to front payroll, rent, and program expenses for months before receiving reimbursement from the city, leaving them cash-strapped and unable to hire qualified staff, invest in professional development, or purchase essential supplies. Smaller organizations are especially vulnerable to these cash flow constraints, increasing the risk of service disruptions or program closures.

In addition, inefficient and fragmented data-sharing systems impose significant administrative burdens on CBOs. Organizations are frequently required to enter the same client and program data into multiple, incompatible systems across different city agencies. This duplicative reporting consumes staff time that could otherwise be devoted to direct services and makes it harder to track youth outcomes across programs. The lack of integrated data systems ultimately weakens accountability and makes it more difficult to assess program effectiveness citywide.

3. An Underpaid and Underdeveloped Workforce:

The child care and youth services workforce is a cornerstone of the continuum of care. Early childhood and youth development staff are highly skilled and deeply committed, yet they remain chronically underpaid, with earnings far below government and for-profit counterparts. In 2023, childcare workers had a median income of just \$25,000 -- 45 percent of the median income of all other non-child care workers, and the lowest median income of any care work occupation.¹³ And, a recent report by the Center for New York City Affairs revealed that Family Child Care (FCC) and Group Family Child Care (GFCC) providers bring in, on average, \$7.33 and \$5.98 per hour, when considering their business expenses.¹⁴

These professionals—spanning family childcare providers, early childhood teachers and support staff, and afterschool professionals—face an affordability crisis like the New York families they serve. This workforce is composed predominantly of women

The median income for child care providers is \$25,000.

of color, and decades of disinvestment in their work have only deepened inequities across the city's labor force. Without adequate compensation and support, the workforce cannot meet the growing needs of families, and the broader goal of universal access remains out of reach.

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III. Key Recommendations to Drive Affordability & Universal Access

Recognizing that the City depends on nonprofits and CBOs to deliver essential services, C4C sees the following recommendations as vital to achieving universal access to a high-quality, affordable universal and seamless care system.

Recommendation 1: Invest in Universal Access:

1.1 Protect access to critical existing ECE programs and youth services at risk of losing funding: The City Fiscal Year 2026 Adopted Budget included important restorations of ECE program funding. However, much of this funding was for one year only, putting these critical programs at risk if funding is not once again restored and baselined.

Moreover, New York City's child care voucher program (CCAP) is severely underfunded, forcing approximately 10,000 low-income families onto waitlists for urgently needed child care services; the persistent CCAP funding gap has created tremendous strain and uncertainty for many of the city's highest-need families.¹⁵

These funding challenges are further compounded by the unreliability of federal grants and state foundation aid dollars in funding early childhood and youth services. Both funding streams are in a precarious position, meaning service providers will likely face worsening budget instability. Almost all youth service programs rely—both directly and indirectly—on federal funding streams that are currently at risk, both due to potential budget cuts, including Head Start, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and Child Care Block Grants.



We urge the next Administration to:

- **Ensure critical one-year ECE funding is baselined**, including \$70 million for preschool special education evaluations and services, \$25 million for Promise NYC, \$10 million for new infant and toddler seats in high-needs communities, and \$5 million for ECE outreach.
- **Work with the State to secure funding** necessary to prevent program closures and eliminate waitlists resulting from inadequate funding for the child care assistance (CCAP) program.
- **Monitor and restore \$80 million** for any Head Start capacity lost as a result of federal funding shifts.

1.2 Create universal access to year-round afterschool and summer programs: The next Mayoral administration has a critical opportunity to make our city's afterschool and summer programs truly universal. This investment promises to address and combat disparities, support the economic strength of our city, and put all students on a path to social and emotional growth and academic achievement. We urge equitable access to capacity, targeting areas with the most need, as well as the guarantee of high-quality, diverse programming offered at all locations.

We urge the next Administration to:

- **Transition** towards a year-round out-of-school contracted system, one that includes a seamless program covering afterschool and summer hours.

- **Allocate** additional seats at the requested rates to address the disparity of programs to the youth population in each community.
- **Center the needs of families and students** in temporary housing, foster care, ELL, and students with disabilities in determining access.

- Invest in the Capital Plan to make building structures ADA accessible
- Invest in paraprofessionals for after school programs to ensure continuity for students from school day to after school.

1.3 Provide support to young children with developmental delays and disabilities in birth-to-five programs and address the severe shortage of preschool special education programs: New York City continues to fail young children with developmental delays and disabilities. Despite recent investments in preschool special education seats and services, more must be done to address teacher and provider shortages to make sure that preschool special education programs, whether within New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) or contracted through a community-based organization, are accessible to all students who need them.¹⁶

Preschool special education teachers are among the lowest-paid teachers in New York City, making less than their counterparts in NYCPS.¹⁷ As a result, preschool special education teachers are leaving for higher-paying positions within NYCPS, CBOs have been forced to close their programs, and children are forced

to wait at home until a special education seat opens. The lack of providers (speech therapists, occupational therapists, etc.) has forced children in integrated classrooms to wait for their services, causing further harm and developmental delays.¹⁸

We urge the next Administration to:

- **Enhance** funding for preschool special education seats to ensure that every child who needs a preschool education seat receives one.
- **Hire** necessary staff to ensure that every child with an IEP receives the full array of services and accommodations to which they are entitled.
- **Ensure** on-time transportation for children in special classes or special classes in an integrated setting, as required by a child's IEP.
- **Ensure** that staff at community-based preschool special education programs are included in the recent labor contract agreements enhancement.

1.4 Ensure children and youth with disabilities, students in temporary housing, students in foster care, and English Language Learners can fully participate in all afterschool and summer programs: New York's children and youth with disabilities have been systematically excluded from afterschool and summer program opportunities. At the start of the 23-24 school year, only 31.1% of public schools were accessible; this is unacceptable in the largest school district in the country.¹⁹

Moreover, our after-school and summer programs are not adequately resourced to ensure students with disabilities, students in temporary housing, students in foster care, and English Language Learners can fully participate in programs essential for social development and connection.²⁰

We urge the next Administration to:

- **Allocate at least \$1.25 billion for school accessibility projects in the 2025-2029 Capital Plan**, ensuring that at least 50% of buildings serving as the primary location for a school are fully accessible. This funding could bring an additional 150 to 200 buildings to full accessibility by 2029.
- **Transform the busing contracts and extend hours** to ensure that students with disabilities, students in temporary housing, and students in foster care have access to transportation for after-school and summer activities.
- **Ensure paraprofessionals are included in the cost of programs** and providers can fully staff programs to support the needs of their student cohort.
- **Launch an inter-agency office** led by City Hall focused on improving enrollment for children in temporary housing across education services.

1.5 Create more older youth opportunities: Throughout New York City, there continues to be limited afterschool program options for high

school students. This includes limited age-appropriate and diverse extracurricular activities. There has also been a divestment from the State to support programs for older youth. Young people across the city have been asking for work programs where they can earn money while in school. There are currently limited but impactful Learning to Work Program that supports older youth who are working while in school and seeking internships.

We urge the next Administration to:

- **Expand and baseline funding** for Learning to Work Programs, which would allow more older youth to complete high school while working by providing paid internships and work experience.
- **Provide age-appropriate and flexible programming** for high school students.
- **Restore and expand SYEP** to foster year-round career development.
- **Provide funding to expand** the Work Learn Grow program, which provides year-round youth employment in Community Schools

1.6 Expand access and age down the system for infants and toddlers: Families across New York City struggle to access affordable care for their young children, which creates profound economic strain both at the individual and city level. There are a number of options city leaders should consider, both to create more free and affordable options for children under five and to strengthen current programs and systems to better meet the needs of families with young children.

Families across New York City struggle to access affordable care for their young children.

We urge the next Administration to consider investing in:

- **Expanding free options for families with children two years old and younger.** This effort should prioritize high-need districts with high rates of families living in poverty, with the aim of expanding free universal care for two-year-olds across New York City over the course of several years, as proposed in the 2 Care for All Blueprint.
- **Continue converting** school-day, school-year seats to full-day, year-round early childhood education seats to increase options for families with young children.
- **Strengthening the Family Child Care workforce** by implementing funding and administrative reforms, recognizing that FCC is the backbone of infant and toddler care.^{21, 22}
- **Adopting community eligibility standards** for communities where a high share of children under 13 reside in households eligible for the CCAP program, as proposed in the Empire State Campaign for Children's Child Care for All plan.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen CBOs and the Nonprofit Workforce:

2.1 Pay human service nonprofits on time and implement a plan for catch-up payments: For years, human service non profits have experienced massive delays in both contract registration and payment due to the city's dysfunctional and poorly coordinated contracting processes. Because contracting with the city is a long process that includes RFP application and selection, a registration with the Comptroller's office, itemized budget review and approval, and, eventually, invoicing, there are multiple inflection points where a process breakdown can cause or compound payment delays. For example, an April 2025 Comptroller report found that, in DYCD alone, there were \$412 million in contracts that passed their start date but were awaiting registration with the Comptroller's office. And, on average, it takes DYCD over 400 days after a contract start date to issue its first payment.²³ These payment delays force non-profits to take on debt, pursue layoffs, and scale back service delivery – and these challenges disproportionately impact smaller community based organizations with less fiscal stability.²⁴

We urge the next Administration to:

- Immediately pay all outstanding invoices** so that organizations are paid for the services they already provided before any new programs are implemented.

- Fully launch and expand ContractStat** to track delays in the contracting process from start to finish, including payments.
- Make partial invoice payments** a standard practice across agencies.
- Invest in structural improvements** to PASSport.
- Increase contract processing capacity** and increase headcounts at human services agencies to enable timely contract management.

2.2 Pay human service non-profits adequately, including fully funding indirect cost rates and cost escalators: Despite relying on the nonprofit human services sector to deliver essential government services, New York City's agencies and their respective procurement systems continue to fail to adequately compensate providers. A recent survey administered by the Nonprofit Finance Fund found that more than three-quarters (78%) of NYC nonprofits receive funding from federal, state, and/or local government – and yet, more than 80% of local nonprofits report challenges finding funds that cover full costs and reaching long-term financial sustainability.²⁵ Much of this can be attributed to the fact that city and state contracts have failed to keep pace with inflation and rising indirect costs, including rent and insurance.²⁶ Because city contracts use suppressed and stagnant wages, the nonprofit human services workforce, which predominantly consists of women of color, has long suffered lower wages than their counterparts in the public and private sectors.

Chronic underfunding is especially evident in after school contracts, where even the per-participant rates outlined in the new RFP—\$6,800 for full-year COMPASS and \$3,900 for school-year SONYC—still fall far short of the true cost of operation.²⁷ As a result, providers recover only 60–70% of program costs and are forced to divert scarce private dollars, reduce service quality, or pay wages well below what staff skills and responsibilities merit, with the gap widening each year without cost escalators.

We urge the next Administration to:

- **Raise base wages** in human service contracts to reflect current inflation and establish an appropriate wage floor, for both part-time and full-time workers, that allows providers to compete in NYC's labor market.
- **Include annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs)** in all contracts to prevent future erosion of wages and operating budgets.
- **Reimburse providers for their approved indirect cost rates (ICRs)** rather than defaulting to de minimis or capped rates that understate actual overhead.
- **Engage providers early to ensure transparent, market-based RFPs.** To create effective and sustainable programs, agencies should involve nonprofit providers, researchers, and funders at the outset. Key actions include requiring a concept paper before RFP release to collect input on service gaps, program design, and fiscal viability to ensure programs are workable and responsive.

The biggest threat to the sustainability of the early childhood education system is the underpayment of the workforce.

2.3 Create pay parity for the early childhood workforce: The biggest threat to the sustainability of the early childhood education system is the underpayment of the workforce. In every modality and at every staff level, teachers, staff, directors, and providers in both center-based and home-based child care programs earn salaries and benefits significantly less than their similarly credentialed counterparts in the public schools. This has led to an exodus of workers and instability in the system.

We urge the next Administration to:

- **Expedite payments** of collectively bargained salary increases
- **Bring salaries and benefits in contracted early childhood education programs to parity** with their counterparts in public schools
- **Institute longevity differentials** for the ECE workforce in line with comparable roles in public schools
- **Adjust rates in home-based programs** to allow providers to earn salaries at parity with public school salaries.

Recommendation 3: Enhance Systems-Wide Coordination:

3.1 Create clear structures for inter-agency communication across all youth services: The child care system in the City is governed and monitored by multiple State and City agencies – New York State Education Department (NYSED), Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), Administration for Children's Services (ACS), Department of Health and Mental Health (DOHMH), DYCD, Department of Budget (DOB), Fire Department New York (FDNY), New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), and NYCHA – with disparate missions and priorities. Too often, these agencies' competing responsibilities and misaligned processes slow or impede service delivery for children and families. Strengthening coordination across agencies would not only improve access but also generate long-term cost savings by increasing efficiency and reducing reliance on more expensive downstream interventions, such as foster care or court involvement. If New York City is committed to achieving universal child care and universal afterschool, it must better coordinate and leverage its existing network of youth service programs.

We urge the next Administration to:

- Create an inter-agency cabinet or working group** focused on coordination and efficiency across city departments and initiatives that serve children and youth. This could involve strengthening and codifying the NYC Children's Cabinet or creating a similar

initiative that has the latitude and authority to ensure coordination and efficiency across the continuum of care.

- Improve inter-agency communication methods,** including messages to providers, so that the City's communications are consistent and timely.

3.2 Build coordinated enrollment and data systems both within the early childhood system and across all youth service systems: To remain a city where families can afford to raise children and access opportunity, NYC must improve interagency coordination so families can connect seamlessly to needed services. While multi-service community-based organizations are able to serve children and youth at multiple points throughout their lives, not all youth in the city are able to benefit from this continuum of care due to a lack of coordination among public services and restrictive policies that prevent organizations from easily maintaining youth across programs. For example, early childhood providers (including both center and home-based) are significantly burdened by arduous processes for approving child care permits and staff clearances. To reduce fragmentation and create a more integrated process, agencies must align eligibility requirements, enrollment, and compliance processes across agencies to reduce duplication and delays.

We urge the next Administration to:

- Allow for providers to directly enroll participants** in ECE or other youth development programs to streamline the process and allow for a more direct access to service.

- **Create a child-care inter-agency working group** of all the City agencies responsible for the contracting, auditing, siting, permitting, and licensing of child care programs that will report directly to the Deputy Mayor(s). This could be facilitated by the Mayor's Office of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and would manage and report on:
 - Providers' issues with contract payment
 - Providers' issues with site violations
 - Providers' issues with permits and license approvals

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