

NEW YORK: A CHILD CARE STATE OF MIND



PARENTS & PROVIDERS SHARE THEIR CHILD CARE EXPERIENCES



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Empire State
CAMPAIGN FOR CHILD CARE

Dear Lawmaker,

While New York State has made tremendous strides in child care over the last few years, the state of child care across New York is still concerning, as families across the state of New York are struggling to find high quality, affordable child care in their communities, and also struggling to pay for that care.

While we celebrate the additional availability of programs like 3-K and UPK in New York City, and additional pilot programs in some areas of the state, the reality is that these programs still leave so many parents scrambling for full-time child care that fits their needs, in their communities - including the many parents who work nontraditional or fluctuating hours. In addition, parents who are pursuing higher education and those looking for work also need child care to meet their goals.

Child care costs continue to remain prohibitive for too many families. Child care is the largest monthly bill for many New York families with children, costing an average of \$3,149 per month per month for an infant and a 4-year-old in a child care center (\$37,782 per year)¹. Similar to the rest of the country, the cost of child care for infant care in New York is higher than public college tuition; the current rate for in-state tuition for a commuting student at a SUNY college is \$14,040.

The costs don't end when children start elementary school. Families who have two school-age children in afterschool care spend on average over \$25,000 in after school care per year for two school age children in a family-based program.² Parents are still paying a considerable amount of their take home pay for afterschool care, and many times it is not available in their schools or in their communities at large. In addition to after school care, parents also have to navigate school closures, holidays and other days when there is no care available.

Right now, we have another pressing issue in New York: as of this writing, New York City and 19 counties around New York State have closed enrollment and/or are maintaining a waitlist for child care assistance because of inadequate funding.³ In New York City, over 28,000 children are on a waitlist to access child care assistance. This affects not only the families left without childcare assistance, but also the child care providers who have seen children leave their programs because their families cannot afford to keep them in care without assistance.

Parents aren't the only ones being squeezed. Early educators are being paid poverty-level wages and too often struggle just to support their own families. Child care workers in New York earn a median wage of just \$37,970 (and lower if they are family-based providers) compared to \$70,770, the median wage of all New York workers.⁴

Childcare is crucial because it helps boost the economy and build stronger communities. There is no doubt that child care is necessary for the strength of our state economy; the lack of affordable quality child care costs the economy an estimated 13.6 billion is lost in earnings and productivity.⁵

The experiences you will read in this storybook are simply a snapshot of the extreme child care challenges parents and child care providers face all over the state. We ask that you commit to investing the resources needed to create a truly universal child care system that meets the needs of all New York children, families, communities, and early educators.

Sincerely,

Diana E. Limongi*

Senior Campaign Director, MomsRising

Dorothy (Dede) Hill*

Director of Policy, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

**Empire State Campaign for Child Care (ESCCC) Steering Committee Members*

1, 2. Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, Prioritizing Low-Income Families in Rollout to Universal Child Care. Jan. 2026.
3. CCAP Monthly CCBG Status Report Survey Results **4.** Department of Labor's report, "Child Care in New York State, 2023
5. First Five Years Fund, Facts About New York

Navigating the world of child care has been a rollercoaster ride filled with challenges and frustrations. As a single mom of four, my experiences range from the struggle of finding a qualified caregiver to the heartache of being turned away due to age restrictions or lack of availability. After becoming unhoused in 2018, securing reliable child care became a daunting task that often felt insurmountable.

Access to quality child care is crucial for my family's well-being. It's not just about having someone to watch my kids; it's about providing them with a safe, nurturing environment where they can learn and grow. Quality care allows me to focus on rebuilding my career and creating a stable life for my children. Without it, the cycle of instability continues, affecting not just my job prospects but my children's future.

The lack of accessible child care has profoundly impacted our lives. When I was unable to secure a spot for my youngest, I faced immense stress and frustration. It delayed my plans to return to work, pushing me further into financial insecurity. Each day without reliable care felt like a step back, impacting not only my mental health but also my children's well-being. They deserve opportunities to thrive, which I couldn't provide amidst the chaos.

Affording child care has always been a struggle. With limited resources and a tight budget, families often find themselves weighing the costs against other basic needs. Child care costs can consume a significant portion of their income, leaving little for other essentials. The financial strain is overwhelming, especially when unexpected expenses arise or when we can't find care that fits our needs.

Finding the right care for my child has been a challenge. I've faced numerous hurdles, including long waiting lists, age restrictions, and financial limitations. When I finally found a provider, I was met with another obstacle: the requirement to go through an extensive process involving ACS and HRA. The week it took to transfer my case meant my provider went unpaid, adding another layer of stress to an already difficult situation.

If my child care provider were to close suddenly, it would create an immediate crisis for my family. The thought of scrambling to find new care while juggling work and household responsibilities is terrifying. It would disrupt our routine and add to the uncertainty we already face. The potential for losing my job looms large, as without



care, my ability to work diminishes. I have had to reduce my hours and missed job opportunities solely because of child care issues.

Each time I faced a scheduling conflict, the fear of losing my job or being unable to provide for my children loomed over me. It's a harsh reality that many parents face when they can't secure reliable care.

I empathize deeply with child care workers who are often underpaid while trying to support their families on poverty-level wages. It's a tough position to be in, and their dedication is admirable, but they deserve better compensation. When teachers and caregivers are paid fairly, it not only supports their families but also translates into better care for our children.

It's vital that my child's teacher is paid enough to support their family. When educators and caregivers receive fair wages, it reflects a societal commitment to valuing the important work they do. A well-compensated caregiver can invest more time and energy into nurturing and educating our children, creating a positive environment that benefits us all.

In conclusion, the journey through child care has been fraught with challenges, but it's also a testament to resilience. Our struggles highlight the critical need for accessible, affordable, and quality child care—something every family deserves.

– MANSIE, RIDGEWOOD

It's extremely hard as a parent and a single mom with one income to find adequate and affordable childcare, especially when you make above poverty wages, but not enough to be completely self-sufficient. There is a disparity in whom the government renders in need of assistance and the many of us who really do! I've been fighting this battle for 3 years. Something really needs to change.

– **ATAUR, GULSHAN**

I have a two year old daughter who was in a locally owned child care facility until May 2026. Her monthly tuition already cost more than our mortgage, and tuition was increased further, making it unsustainable for her to stay there. Thankfully, we've found part time in home care, but I've had to reduce my hours to make everything work. The cost of childcare is unsustainable, and it is still rising.

– **L., ROCHESTER**

I am a child care provider struggling to stay open. The pay is not enough for the critical work we do, and there are no benefits like health insurance, paid time off, or retirement.

Operating costs continue to rise, but families cannot afford higher tuition, leaving providers in an unsustainable position. Many of us love this work, but low wages and lack of support are forcing providers to leave the field. Child care is essential, and providers deserve fair pay and benefits to survive.

– **DIANNE, ST. ALBANS**

I am a childcare worker. Across the industry, we need higher pay, health care and most of all respect. In so many cases we are treated as disposable, turnover and burnout are high, expectations are high and workers are left exhausted and discouraged.

Too much to post everything here but I would urge lawmakers to meet with child care givers-the ones actually doing the work, not center admin, not licensors, when it's time to shape these programs.

– **TAMMY, PALMYRA**

NEW YORK'S AVERAGE CHILD CARE COST OF \$14,621 IS THE SECOND HIGHEST IN IN THE U.S.



SOURCE: NY State Comptroller's Office, Lingerin
Challenges in the Child Care Sector) February 2025

I've been so fortunate to be able to access quality childcare for my son and daughter through our local YMCA. My children's teachers are kind, professional, attentive, and communicative. My kids thrive there.

I cannot imagine these teachers, who bring out the best in my kids, are making enough money to comfortably support their own families - despite the incredibly high cost of care.

My son's care alone costs more than my mortgage. My husband and I both work full-time to make sure our kids have what they need, but at the end of the day, there's not a whole lot left over to save for the future.

I would love to see NY invest in early childhood education and in families.

– **Z., AUBURN**

My daughter pays \$340 a WEEK for her 2 year old daughter. That's more than her rent! They dream of buying a house someday, but it's not looking good right now.

– **AME, PHILMONT**

I'll never forget when my oldest was born, I started calling child care providers, and I was shocked to learn that child care would cost more than half my paycheck. That was the start of a long journey of struggling

without access to high-quality, affordable care. Right now, my oldest is in elementary school and my 4-year-old recently got into public pre-K, which is a huge blessing. But I don't have child care for my youngest, which is a struggle.



My husband and I make it work by juggling our schedules. I work remotely, and he is a freelance artist who spends a lot of his time caring for our kids. Not having child care limits our income. We rely on SNAP and Medicaid, but even with those supports, it's hard because it's so expensive to live these days. Society is just not built for you to have multiple kids. They say it takes a village, but it feels like you have to buy the village.

– ROSDALY, BRONX

I migrated from my birth country in 2012 and have been here ever since, raising my children with no real help. Now a permanent resident, I work about 46 hours a week trying to make ends meet and take care of my children which has been a real task. Obtaining childcare has always been difficult for me with no family support and trying to obtain childcare voucher has not been a walk in the park. Going to HRA alone is an all-day process and while you are there the majority of the staff are generally

CHILD CARE IS THE LARGEST MONTHLY BILL FOR MANY NY FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN



Costing an average of **\$3,149 per month** for an infant and a 4-year-old in a child care center (**\$37,782 per year**)

SOURCE: Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

rude and/or nonchalant about your needs. I have been told once the system was done, but they would submit my information and call me when they had processed my voucher – but there was never a call. When I was able to go back a month later to follow up, I was told the voucher submission had expired and I needed to start over.

Since then, I have tried to enroll my child in a new daycare center that has opened near me, however they are not fully in operation as they are waiting to be approved by the city. My daughter goes at least once a week for one hour with me being present. I have been holding on to this option because the only request was a budget letter from my PA case.

I currently work remotely while taking care of my now 2-year-old, which has become a real task. My work efficiency has decreased and childcare fees are expensive. Truly bracing myself to either face going to HRA again and restart the process or praying that the new school opens soon.

Please help parents and childcare providers alike as it takes a village to raise a child, we are all in this together.

– K., BRONX

I have been a NYS Licensed Home Daycare Provider for over 8 years. I have a bilingual daycare with a diverse group of children. I have helped and supported community members and hardworking families by providing a safe, loving and reliable environment for their children to flourish in.

Right now, many families cannot afford childcare along with the cost of living. If parents stay home, they cannot work. If they cannot work, they struggle and live in poverty, causing a poor quality of life for the entire family. Poverty leads to violence and unwanted and very unfortunate circumstances.

I have personally seen the negative impact of the loss of childcare funding assistance and lack of affordability. I had to let go of staff who I can no longer afford to pay for due to funding availability for families. I had no choice but to let go of families I can no longer help. Many of them lost their jobs to stay at home with their child, unable to pay for their everyday expenses.

Some families had to leave their schooling. I even worked for free for some time trying to help families stay afloat. Families are working overtime trying to pay their childcare bill, resulting in spending very little time with their children.

I have had to turn families away due to not having enough staff to keep up with regulations. Families had to start over, lost employment and school hours. Some were forced to leave their children with unqualified and unreliable people as a last resort, leaving them worried and feeling uneasy as they went into the workforce.

It's important for my staff and I to be able to make a living while supporting other working families. Without a reasonable amount of income, I cannot keep my doors open or keep and pay staff to allow more children to enroll into my program. Bills need to be paid, children fed, regulations, trainings and a home to maintain... The work that childcare providers do is not for the weak, it's a lot of work.

We play many roles on a daily basis with longer work hours to accommodate work, school shifts, and schedules. A fair and living wage helps us stay open and operate in a way that will satisfy our clients' needs and keep children safe, and for the children to have an enjoyable experience while away from home.

– SHEILA, GREEN ISLAND



"I have personally seen the negative impact of the loss of childcare funding assistance and lack of affordability. I had to let go of staff who I can no longer afford to pay for due to funding availability for families. I had no choice but to let go of families I can no longer help. Many of them lost their jobs to stay at home with their child, unable to pay for their everyday expenses."

"Child care has been one of the biggest challenges for our family. My husband and I both work full-time, and most of my PTO is used for daycare closures, school breaks, and sick days."

– T., MANHATTAN

As a single mother of 2 I have struggled to get a HRA voucher for child care but have been told that I can not get a voucher due to the fact I'm not working or going to school. And then to be asked why I am not working as to make me feel like a parent that is just living off of public assistance is just wrong.

– STACIE, BRONX

Child care has been one of the biggest challenges for our family. My husband and I both work full-time, and most of my PTO is used for daycare closures, school breaks, and sick days. During the summer months especially, it's a constant struggle to figure out coverage while balancing work and family responsibilities.

We had a nanny when our daughter was between 1 and 2.5 years old, and she was wonderful, but the cost was so high that we went into debt trying to pay a fair, living wage. Even now, as a two-income household, child care is one of our largest expenses.

Access to affordable, quality child care is what allows us to work and support our family. This September, our daughter will start NYC's free 3K program, and honestly it feels like a life raft. For the first time in years, we'll have some financial breathing room and won't be constantly worrying about how to cover the next school break, summer week, or child care bill. Child care shouldn't be this hard for working families.

– T., MANHATTAN

**COST FOR AN
INFANT IN
A FAMILY CHILD
CARE SETTING IS
\$400 PER WEEK
(\$1,600/MONTH – \$19,200/YEAR)**



**→ FOR CENTER-BASED CARE
FOR CHILDREN UNDER 2 IT'S
\$500 PER WEEK
(\$2,000/MONTH – \$24,000/YEAR)**

SOURCE: Day Care Council of NY

Childcare in my neighborhood (Inwood) has been challenging. There are only a handful of daycares that come highly recommended and 90% of them were full and operate using a waiting list. Besides the lack of well run centers with strong teachers, the monthly cost of full-time care is absurd! I know of many families who decide to have one parent stay home with a young child because living on one salary and saving on childcare is more sustainable than having two working parents who send their kid to daycare.

– E., INWOOD, NY

Affordable afterschool care or programs are always a challenge as is affordable summer camp.

– NEGID, MANHATTAN

I wish every state had universal preschool. Before my son turned 3, he attended a child care program that cost \$2,200/month. I never could have afforded it on my own. That's about \$26k/year. Those are funds that could have gone toward groceries, educational trips and experiences for our son, home renovations, or things for his room. The cost definitely had an impact. Not all states have universal preschool. Some have it, but it's

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**The current rate for in-state tuition
for a commuting student at a SUNY
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only a half day – but then how are you supposed to work? We need funds for afterschool too. In this economy, parents need FT jobs to pay the rent. So many parents have been pushed out of the workforce because of child care. We need to invest in child care nationwide.

– **SHAZIA, BROOKLYN**

My partner and I welcomed the birth of our rainbow baby in 2022, after the great loss of his older brother. I had a full-time job with stable income, good health benefits, paid maternity leave, and even an employer with a supportive breastfeeding policy.

Unfortunately, due to the exorbitant cost of child care in a secure, supportive environment that was located physically close to our home, I was left with no other option but to resign and become a stay-at-home parent until our son enters free-of-charge universal 3K so that we could have access to care that we could afford.

Even then, as I plan to return to the workforce, my priorities have shifted to options that can accommodate the six-hour school day that my son will attend, so I am available for pick-up and drop off, without needing to pay additionally for an extended day of care, one that aligns with the typical workday.

– **AMPARO, SUNNYSIDE**

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– **AMPARO, SUNNYSIDE**

As a working mom of two children with a wide age gap (7 years) and a husband who has a job with a varied schedule, I have been dealing with the challenges of finding safe/affordable and convenient childcare for 14 years. At first, it was just trying to find a spot in a daycare, and while that was overwhelming, so was parenting a newborn baby. It just seemed like par for the course. Then as your child ages out of daycare age, and into the kindergarten/elementary school age, you realize not only does school end at 2pm and your job does not, but also that there are A LOT of school holidays/closures that also don't align with the work calendar.

The journey to find an afterschool program that is either in the school building or that will pick up from school and take to a location, was easier in some respects because our school had a program in the building.

What was not easy about it was that you have to sign up in March for September and in order to get a discount on the enrollment fee had to pay full tuition upfront and there were no reimbursements if you had to leave the program.

We thought the discount was important but that meant I put it all on a credit card while still paying daycare costs monthly from March-August (daycare cost more than my rent!) Even for a nonprofit afterschool program,



it still cost us a few thousand dollars to enroll for the school year and did not have built in coverage for any school day closures plus we would still have to figure out summer break.

The cycle is never ending and getting a spot in a summer camp can be very competitive. We discovered that in NYC you need to enroll in January if you want a whole summer (which still ends at least weeks before school starts) and that you have to be careful that you find a program that covers the entire day (till 6PM) because many end at 3 or 4PM. This cycle continues ad nauseam throughout elementary school.

Once you hit middle school the challenge is finding a program for that age group because it's not as common, and getting them to/from because 6th and 7th grade is still too young to be left to your own devices. In our family we were juggling the transition from elementary to middle school while also navigating daycare for our youngest.

That brings in the additional layer of needing to have everything in close enough proximity that I could get these kids to school/daycare on time and do pick up at night in two locations after leaving my office and getting home to do dinner and bedtime routines.

You may be wondering where my husband was in all of this and that makes sense. If he had a regular 9-5 schedule we would share this load and divide and conquer which would give us many more options.

That doesn't work for us because he works a job that could be from 7am - 11pm or 9pm - 4am or any other strange combination of hours, oftentimes with only

3 or 4 hours between his different shifts. We almost never know his schedule more than a week in advance and even then jobs can be added as late as the day of in some cases. His work provides our health insurance which means he needs to take the work when offered or we run the risk of losing our insurance.

This also means we cannot depend on him being able to do any of the drop offs/pick ups. He absolutely does them when he is able but more often than not he is not available which leaves me to navigate all these needs.

We are so lucky that we have been able to "afford" childcare and find programs that offer enrichment opportunities to the kids. Not everyone is as fortunate as we have been and it is still a challenge for us financially. I am regularly putting child care on credit cards because we cannot make the payments in the time frame required from our bank account.

I am now moving credit card debt to 0% interest cards to try and get ahead of it but I can never get clear... there is always another payment for another school year or summer. My afterschool program is now more like \$7000/year and we have to do it because we both need to work.

– KARA, ASTORIA

60 PERCENT OF NY CENSUS TRACTS ARE CLASSIFIED AS CHILD CARE DESERTS



With at least **three** children under the age of five per available slot in registered home-based providers or day care centers.

SOURCE: 2023, NY Office of Child and Family Services



Over the last year, childcare wasn't simply where my daughter went while I worked. Child care was the infrastructure holding our family together during one of the most difficult seasons of our lives. There were days when "working remotely" meant opening my laptop from my husband's hospital room after emergency surgeries. Other days it was my father's or my grandmother's. I'd been balancing work with caregiving across generations, and having reliable child care with extended hours meant there was at least one part of my day where I didn't have to worry about how our daughter was doing because we knew she was safe, cared for, and guided through learning with her loving and supportive teachers.

Our daughter's care was tied to my employment as an employee benefit and that benefit gave our family access to quality, extended-hour care that can otherwise cost families roughly \$2,000 to more than \$4,000 a month depending on a child's age and scheduling needs.

Then, at the beginning of June, I was laid off, which was awful timing as my husband had upcoming spine surgery. Suddenly, our family's childcare needs changed instantly, and we were caught in another gap. For the first few weeks of his recovery I wasn't even able to file for unemployment because my immediate focus was to help him while caring for our daughter. We talk about child care as something parents need when they're working, but families also need care when they're between jobs or recovering from a crisis.

By the time I lost my job, it was too late to apply for NYC's free Summer Rising program. With both my husband and myself out of work, scrambling to pay thousands of dollars for summer camp wasn't an option. And while we're fortunate to have family nearby, "just ask the grandparents" isn't always the solution people imagine. My retired parents already care for our nephew three days a week while managing health concerns of their own. I didn't want our family's child care crisis to add to the generational caregiving burdens.

So our daughter has been home with us this summer. She's incredibly social. She went from spending her days surrounded by classmates, teachers, activities, and routines to suddenly not having that community every day. Thankfully, I'm a former preschool teacher, so I have the experience to supplement her learning at home by guiding her through activities and making sure she continues to build skills so we can avoid that summer slide.

Being unemployed doesn't mean I suddenly have unlimited time to provide full-time care. Looking for work is like a job in itself. I'm searching for opportunities, tailoring resumes, completing applications, and networking while trying to figure out what comes next for our family, all while caring for my preschooler, who understandably wants my attention and companionship.

And I think that's an important part of the child care convo that's not being discussed enough. Affordable child care doesn't become unnecessary when a parent loses their job. It can be one of the very things they need to get back to work.

Without it, parents can become trapped in an impossible cycle: you need employment to afford childcare, and sometimes you need childcare to have the time and flexibility required to find employment.

Our experience has also made me think differently about what we mean when we tell families they should rely on their “village”. Grandparents are working longer, managing their own health, caring for other grandchildren, or supporting aging relatives themselves in multigenerational families like mine. Everyone may already be caregiving for someone.

I’ve experienced this system as a mother, working parent, caregiver, former preschool teacher, and early childhood professional. I’ve seen what happens when care works- and what families are forced to piece together when it doesn’t.

And the truth is, it’s not just families that are stretched; educators and providers are stretched too. Families can’t continue to absorb constantly rising costs, but the solution cannot be keeping early educators’ wages low either. These professionals care for and educate our children during some of the most important developmental years of their lives. They deserve wages that allow them to pay rent, buy groceries, care for their own children, and build stable lives.

I want lawmakers to understand what a lack of childcare truly costs us all: for parents, it’s work hours and wages; it can determine whether someone accepts a job or stays

in the workforce at all. And when a provider closes, or an educator leaves because they can no longer afford to do this work, families don’t magically stop needing care. Someone is going to have to juggle the disruption - usually a parent, more often a mother. I know firsthand how transformative an employer-sponsored child care benefit can be; it can feel like winning the lottery. But I also know how quickly that stability can disappear when childcare is tied to employment.

That’s why I believe emphatically that we need universal child care. Our children deserve opportunities to learn, play, socialize, and build relationships with other children; their care shouldn’t depend on where their parent works, whether their employer offers a child care benefit, or whether that parent is currently employed. Employer-sponsored child care can be an incredible benefit, and I really want more employers to invest in it. But it CANNOT replace a strong public child care system.

Our safety nets are designed as if families experience one crisis at a time and families like mine just aren’t fortunate enough to live that way. Child care should be infrastructure families can count on- not a benefit they can lose when they need it most.

– DEE, FLUSHING

**95 PERCENT
OF CHILD CARE
PROVIDERS IN
NEW YORK STATE
ARE WOMEN
AND 56%
IDENTIFY AS
PEOPLE OF COLOR**



**IN NEW YORK,
28,000
CHILDREN
ARE ON WAITLISTS
FOR CHILD CARE
ASSISTANCE**





MomsRising.org
MamásConPoder.org

MomsRising.org is an on-the-ground and online grassroots organization of more than a million people who are working to increase family economic security, stop discrimination against women and moms, and build a nation where businesses and families can thrive.

Established in 2006, MomsRising and its members are organizing and speaking out to improve public policy and to change the national dialogue on issues that are critically important to America's families, including criminal justice reform, immigration policy reform, and gun safety. MomsRising is working for paid family and medical leave, affordable, high quality childcare and early learning, and for an end to the wage and hiring discrimination which penalizes women — particularly moms and women of color — and so many others.

Sign up online at www.MomsRising.org. You can also follow us on Instagram, LinkedIn or Facebook.



Empire State
CAMPAIGN FOR CHILD CARE

New York's statewide campaign for universal child care. ESCCC is made up of more than 100 member organizations, representing parents, child care providers, child and family advocates, gender and social justice, provider networks, unions, businesses and many individual members, and a network of over 2,000 supporters. We are working toward a child care system that is free of means testing, with no income, immigration status, or parent activity requirements.

We envision a child care system that compensates child care educators equitably and adequately, on par with their public school counterparts. We strive to build a system that is culturally-responsive and is coordinated and aligned with the many systems families and children rely upon to thrive. This system recognizes and funds child care as a public good, not a private service.

For more information, visit empirestatechildcare.org.