

**Testimony for the Joint Fiscal Committees  
on the SFY 2009-10 *Executive Budget*  
Education Hearing  
January 28, 2009**

**Presented by Karen Schimke, President and CEO  
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy**



*Shaping New York State public policy  
for people in need since 1872*

**Testimony for the Joint Fiscal Committees  
on the SFY 2009-10 *Executive Budget*  
Education Hearing  
January 28, 2009**

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA) believes strongly in the importance of a high-quality early care and learning system that benefits all children and families. SCAA co-convenes *Winning Beginning NY* and convenes the New York Children's Action Network (New York CAN). On behalf of both SCAA and those two advocacy groups, I applaud the Legislature and the Governor for their continued commitment to Pre-K.

That program now benefits approximately 45% of New York State's four-year olds. This year it will serve more than 106,000 children. **We ask the Legislature to support the Executive Budget proposal to maintain funding for Pre-K at 2008-09 levels for the next two years.** This will allow us to provide valuable early education to children across the state, preparing them for success in school and in life.

Unfortunately, the Executive Budget also proposes cutting funding for other early care and learning programs. SCAA requests that the Legislature acknowledge the interconnectedness of the early childhood system and the value of all its components.

We recognize that home visiting and child care do not come under this committee's jurisdiction in terms of funding. However, we strongly believe that if the state continues its siloed approach to early care and learning, programs such as Pre-K will ultimately fail. In short, without child care there is no Pre-K. Children do not begin learning at age four. We must support their learning process beginning at birth if we want them to succeed.

Therefore, we ask the Legislature to:

- Restore cuts to funding for Healthy Families New York, as well as child welfare preventive spending for home visiting programs like Nurse-Family Partnership, thereby preventing child abuse and foster care placements.
- Transfer \$356 million in funding from the Flexible Fund for Family Services to the child care block grant to prevent further erosion in child care funding and ensure that low-income working families have access to child care subsidies.
- Restore \$30 million in lost child care funding to increase the number of available subsidy slots to children in low-income working families. 46,000 fewer children had access to child care subsidies in 2007 than in 2003-04<sup>1</sup>, with an additional 10,000 fewer anticipated to receive subsidies this year due to a reduction in federal block grant funds and the impact of market rate increases. Restoring subsidies is essential to our economy, allowing parents to work while preparing our future workforce and allowing children to thrive.

---

<sup>1</sup> Child Care Development Block Grant April 2005 state plan (2005-07)

- Provide \$600,000 for *Qualitystars NY*, the proposed Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), to draw down funding committed by private sector investors.

## **Home visiting**

The Executive Budget proposes cutting the Healthy Families New York (HFNY) program by 25% and eliminating child welfare preventive spending dollars that partially fund the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and other home visiting programs. We are already hearing reports that child abuse has increased in this economic downturn, due to the increased stress on parents. We have no doubt that these proposed cuts will result in more cases of child abuse. **We urge the state to restore child welfare preventive spending for home visiting and funding for HFNY.**

Home visiting programs such as HFNY and NFP provide savings for the state in reduced child protection and foster care costs. They also provide educational benefits to young children by helping their parents understand the importance of early learning and encouraging them to help develop their children's cognitive and social-emotional abilities.

HFNY serves more than 5,000 families a year in some of New York's highest need communities, with a proven track record of better outcomes for children in high-risk families. The state's stringent randomized trial evaluation of HFNY demonstrated improved health and development, and decreased abuse and neglect. The program employs nearly 500 people in 39 communities across the state. Those jobs keep dollars circulating in local economies.

NFP is active in New York City and in Monroe and Onondaga counties. Approximately 1/3 of NFP funding in New York City comes from child welfare preventive spending. Sixty-five percent of Monroe County's NFP funding and 27% of Onondaga County's NFP funding is child welfare preventive spending. The elimination of these dollars means that entire programs will cease serving an estimated 1,200 families.

Let me give you an example of what a cut in child welfare preventive spending will mean. In Broome County, the Lourdes PACT and Binghamton City School District PACT (Parents and Children Together) alone serve 181 families. Cutting Broome's child welfare preventive funding will mean a decrease of more than \$600,000 for services that include home visiting, health education, mentoring, infant/toddler child care, and staff and program development for child care providers. Programs would be forced to close down, and families would go without much-needed services. That is simply unacceptable.

## **Child care funding**

Counties are burdened by costs and challenged by the need to provide a range of services. Therefore, we understand the state's rationale behind putting child care funding back in the Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS). At first glance, it appears that including child care in the FFFS allows counties flexibility. However, doing so actually forces counties to choose between funding competing children's issues.

Removing child care from the FFFS, as the Legislature so wisely did last year, will ensure that New York State, at a minimum, does not reduce its investment in services for working parents. **We urge the Legislature to transfer \$356 million in funding from the FFFS to the Child**

**Care and Development Block Grant to prevent further erosion in child care funding and ensure that low-income working families have access to child care subsidies.**

Obviously, child care is an essential component of a working family's life. This is the setting in which many children spend more than 10 hours a day. Child care programs allow parents to work, which is imperative in this economic downturn. Now more than ever we should be encouraging those who can work to do so. And we should help them work when we can.

In addition, the full implementation of universal Pre-K depends on the quality of our child care services. This is because, as I mentioned earlier, high-quality child care provides the basis for success in Pre-K. The program's success also depends on child care because 60% of all Pre-K programs are offered in child care settings.

Without subsidy assistance, low-income working families who cannot afford child care on their own must make choices about child care services that could put their children at risk. Sometimes parents are even forced to forgo employment to stay home with their children, leading them to seek public assistance.

Unfortunately, while market rate increases have resulted in an increased cost for child care services, subsidies for those services have decreased. As a result, 46,000 fewer children received subsidies in 2007 than just four years ago. We anticipate another 10,000 children will be denied access to a child care subsidy in 2008 due to a reduction in federal block grant funding and the impact of market rate increases, for a total of 56,000 fewer children receiving subsidized child care.

It is imperative that the state subsidize slots for our lowest income and highest need children so that they are not left behind academically, and so that they are in safe, reliable settings while their parents are at work. **We urge the Legislature to restore \$30 million in lost child care funding to increase the number of available subsidy slots to children in low-income working families.**

**QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement System)**

We know that this is not a good time to be asking for more money. I assure you that we would not be doing so if we did not feel that investing in *Qualitystars NY*—a quality rating and improvement system that will enhance the quality of services in every early care and learning setting, including Pre-K—would be a very wise move for New York State.

*Qualitystars NY* will provide a coherent, systematic way to support program improvement and ensure the best use of public dollars in all early childhood programs. We must move forward now, even in these tight budget times, to ensure the best use of limited dollars. **We urge the state to invest \$600,000 to leverage private sector investments to support the first phase of field testing and to pass legislation that would codify the *Qualitystars NY* program.**

*Qualitystars NY* establishes standards of program excellence by providing a research-based tool for assessing the quality of early childhood programs. It creates a comprehensive strategy for aligning the quality of programs with the investment of public resources. A QRIS provides a

roadmap for program improvement and an accountability measure for progress and funding. It simultaneously supports parents in becoming better educated consumers of early childhood services by providing them with new tools and information. The essential elements to a QRIS are technical assistance and funding targeted to both specific quality improvement and to incentive grants to support programs in meeting higher quality standards.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for allowing me to spend some time discussing the importance of investing in a comprehensive early care and learning system. A vitally important program like Pre-K will not be entirely successful without these other high-quality components. SCAA thanks you for your time and is, as always, available and ready to provide additional information. We are happy to work with your offices to ensure that New York's children and their families receive the best early care and learning opportunities available.