



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

Re: Oversight: EarlyLearn NYC

**Advocates for Children of New York
January 14, 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Lisandra Fernández-Silber, and I am an attorney and legal fellow at Advocates for Children of New York where I focus on early childhood education. For more than 40 years, Advocates for Children has worked to promote access to the best education New York City can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. We are also a proud member of the Campaign for Children.

Given the important role of early childhood education, Advocates for Children has strongly supported the vision of EarlyLearn since its conception, and we continue to do so. While we are grateful that the Administration and the City Council have made great strides to expand and strengthen early childhood education, we must not lose sight of the important work that remains in order to realize the vision of EarlyLearn.

We continue to be concerned that the EarlyLearn rate is insufficient to support the high-quality standards that the program requires. In order to meet the promise of providing a comprehensive, high-quality early childhood education, programs must receive adequate funding, training, technical assistance, and support. These components are particularly important when it comes to serving preschoolers with disabilities, children living in temporary housing, children in foster care, and Dual Language Learners.

One of the clients we assisted was a low-income, working, Spanish-speaking parent, whom I'll call Sonia. Sonia's son, a Dual Language Learner with a disability, was in a full-day EarlyLearn program. Although EarlyLearn programs are responsible for coordinating with the Department of Education to ensure that preschoolers with disabilities receive their special education services, Sonia's son went months without receiving his mandated bilingual speech therapy. After Advocates for Children brought this case to the Department of Education's attention, the Department of Education worked out an arrangement that would require Sonia to leave her job, take her son out of preschool, bring him to a speech therapy agency more than 100 blocks away from his preschool, bring him back to preschool, and then return to work. Given the hardship this arrangement imposed on Sonia and her son, Advocates for Children contacted providers ourselves and found a bilingual therapist who could travel to the

Board of Directors

Eric F. Grossman, *President*
Jamie A. Levitt, *Vice President*
Harriet Chan King, *Secretary*
Paul D. Becker, *Treasurer*

Matt Berke
Kevin J. Curnin
Jessica A. Davis
Adrienne Filipov
Robin L. French
Brian Friedman
Kimberley D. Harris
Caroline J. Heller
Roderick Jenkins
Jeffrey E. LaGueux
Maura K. Monaghan
Jonathan D. Polkes
Raul F. Yanes

Executive Director

Kim Sweet

Deputy Director

Matthew Lenaghan



EarlyLearn site. In the process, we also discovered that two other children at the same EarlyLearn site had special education recommendations for bilingual speech therapy and had not received any speech therapy. We arranged for the provider we found to work with these children as well.

Sonia contacted us again a month later, terrified that her son was going to lose his EarlyLearn seat and his bilingual speech therapy because she was having problems re-certifying her child care eligibility. The program did not seem to have the capacity or resources to help Sonia resolve the eligibility issues and, instead, told Sonia that her son could no longer attend the program. Sonia tried her best to resolve the issue, but the language barriers and the confusing and contradictory information that she received made it difficult. Advocates for Children contacted ACS, and ACS worked with the program to change the child from a child care seat to a Head Start seat in the same class. Due to this change, Sonia's son was able to stay in his preschool seat, and Sonia no longer had to pay burdensome child care fees. However, in the process of resolving these issues, Sonia lost her job for requesting too much time off to deal with problems related to her son's education.

There are so many families like Sonia's. Without EarlyLearn, her son may have fallen through the cracks, as many preschoolers with disabilities and Dual Language Learners from low-income backgrounds do before they even begin kindergarten. While Sonia was grateful for the EarlyLearn program, she wished it had the capacity to get her child's services in place and resolve the eligibility challenges. EarlyLearn programs need adequate funding, training, technical assistance, and support to serve all eligible preschool students, including those who need additional support in order to succeed in the classroom and prepare for kindergarten.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today.