

**Testimony of Shilshila Limbu for New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Education
Hearing on UPK, 3-K, and EarlyLearn**

June 27, 2018

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Shilshila Limbu, and I live in Woodside. I am the mother of Dean, a four-year-old child with autism.

I am glad that the City is expanding public preschool programs. But the City must not forget about children like mine who have disabilities.

I first referred my child, Dean, for preschool special education evaluations more than one year ago at the suggestion of Dean's pediatrician. When the DOE sent me a list of evaluation sites, I made call after call. But the evaluation sites told me that because my family speaks Nepali at home, they could not evaluate my child. I reached out to the DOE several times to ask for help, but the DOE did not help. In fact, the DOE did not schedule evaluations for Dean until I got a lawyer from Advocates for Children involved, many months after I started the process.

Even after evaluations began, the DOE's delays continued. The DOE began evaluating Dean on January 25th, but did not hold an IEP meeting until April 20th—three months later.

At the IEP meeting in April, the DOE determined that my child needed a small preschool special education class, as well as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. However, more than two months have passed, and the DOE has not been able to find a seat in a preschool special education class for my son. The DOE does not have enough preschool seats for all the children with disabilities who need them.

I feel lucky to live in a City that is building more 3-K and Pre-K classes, but my child needs a classroom too, and he has a right to be in a preschool special education class.

I wonder what progress Dean could have made this year if he had been in class with a special education teacher. Would he be starting to talk to me? Would he be able to play with other children? I'll never know because Dean had to sit at home all year with no special education instruction or services.

My child deserves better. We must change this situation and make sure that every preschooler with a disability gets the evaluations, services, and classes they need.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me today.