



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be Delivered to the New York City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing: Children and Youth

Re: Promise NYC - Early Childhood Education & Care for Children who are Undocumented

March 22, 2024

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Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the need for continued funding for Promise NYC. My name is Betty Baez Melo, and I am an attorney and Director of the Early Childhood Education Project at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 50 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. Every year, we help thousands of families navigate the education system, starting from the time children are born.

The first five years of a child's life are a period of rapid brain development that is foundational for a child's ability to learn. As such, we believe that every child should have access to high-quality early childhood care and education programs. We were pleased when the City launched Promise NYC last year to increase access to early childhood programs for children who are undocumented and appreciate the City Council's efforts to secure this funding. Unfortunately, the Mayor's Preliminary Budget does not include funding to continue this crucial initiative, and hundreds of children risk being turned away from their program after June.

Many child care and preschool programs, including New York City Public Schools' Infant & Toddler programs, as well as 3-K and Pre-K programs that offer extended hours, require families to qualify for subsidized child care assistance in order to enroll. These programs have historically excluded children who are undocumented as they are not eligible for this subsidy based on state and federal restrictions.

Since its launch in January 2023, hundreds of families of children who are undocumented have been able to secure child care funding through Promise NYC to



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attend a variety of early childhood programs. Thanks to the program, children have benefitted from safe, high-quality programs that prepare them for success in elementary school and beyond while their parents have been able to work and connect with resources. Unfortunately, this funding is set to expire in June, meaning that children risk losing a seat in their program and new families will be unable to apply.

In Fiscal Year 2023, the City allocated \$10 million, which served approximately 600 children for half the year—from January to June 2023. Last year, the City allocated just \$16 million for the entire fiscal year, instead of the \$20 million requested. For Fiscal Year 2025, as demand continues to grow, we recommend that the City allocate and baseline \$20 million in the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) budget for Promise NYC.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.