



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

**Testimony to be Delivered to the New York City Council
Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education,
Committee on Workforce Development, and Committee on Higher Education**

Re: Early Childhood Educator Workforce Development and Pipeline

April 15, 2026

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Thank you for the chance to discuss the importance of expanding the early childhood workforce to ensure that New York City children have access to high-quality early childhood care and education programs. My name is Betty Baez Melo, and I am an attorney and the Director of Early Childhood Education 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.

To properly serve all children and families seeking to benefit from the City's expanding early childhood care and education programs, the City must be prepared to recruit, retain, and support staff who dedicate themselves to providing safe and nurturing learning environments. We appreciate the Council's efforts to cultivate this vital workforce.

As the City works to build the workforce needed to expand access to early care and education, it is important to ensure such efforts include providers that serve young children with disabilities.

We regularly hear from concerned families of children who have been evaluated and found eligible for Early Intervention or preschool special education services, but who wait weeks and months for the services they were promised to help their child learn. When families ask for help, they are often told that there are not enough special education providers or classrooms to serve all the children who need services.

At a recent hearing before this Council, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) leaders testified that only about 63% of preschool students with disabilities are receiving all their mandated related services, and almost a quarter, 24.4%, are not receiving any. This means that a significant portion of preschool students are waiting for services like speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy that they



need to communicate, hold a pencil, or follow instructions. In addition, only half the preschool students who should be working with a special education teacher for part of the school day are receiving this service. NYCPS also testified that there are between 100-150 children with more significant disabilities waiting for seats in integrated and special education classrooms. Younger children are facing comparable delays. The most recent data available shows that last year only 55% of infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities received all their mandated Early Intervention services within the 30-day legally required timeframe.¹

As the City looks for solutions to increase the early childhood workforce, it must also address the shortage of special education providers that is causing young children with disabilities to go without the services they need and have a legal right to receive – and that are essential for their inclusion and participation in the City's early childhood programs. Expanding early childhood options has the potential to lead to earlier identification of children with developmental delays or disabilities, resulting in positive outcomes for children and for the City, but only if we have the Early Intervention and preschool special education providers available to meet their needs. It is crucial for the supports proposed in Intro. 1656, as well as other early childhood pipeline and workforce development programs, to extend to individuals interested in pursuing careers serving young children with disabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ See NYC Department of Health: *Bureau of Early Intervention FY2025 Annual Report*, December 1, 2025