



WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

January 28, 2022

Dear Senator Kennedy,

Too many working parents – an estimated 1 in 4 women, are being forced to reduce hours or leave the workforce altogether due to child care needs during the pandemic. The current pandemic has only exacerbated already-struggling child care needs. **We are writing to respectfully request that you prioritize \$2M legislative ask for Facilitated Enrollment child care subsidies in Erie County as you did in 2021.** Due to expanded eligibility during the height of the pandemic, there will be NO carry-over funds for this program. Also concerning, due to state waiver expiration, Erie County DSS will return to 200% eligibility (from 85% SMI). While the Legislature allocated federal funding to reduce parent share for child care subsidies, this will increase the utilization of the Facilitated Enrollment program (family share was a huge barrier). This will put an added burden on the Facilitated Enrollment program to support parents earning up to 275% FPL. With rising costs and need due to the pandemic, families are struggling to access care, as many providers have struggled to reopen and affordability has been a challenge. Average annual WDI subsidies have increased \$2,188 per Erie County family since the beginning of the pandemic (2021 compared to 2020).

While child care costs impact individuals under 200% FPL in particular, the benefit cliff produces a steep drop for all low-middle income parents. To address this need, the NYS Workforce Development Institute administers the Facilitated Enrollment Child Care Subsidy program. This program started in Erie County on 10/1/16 and offers subsidies to working parents making up to 275% FPL and is designed to assist families who earn more than the limits for the Erie County program. Funds for this program are from the NYS Senate. Your leadership has secured \$500,000 for the Erie County program each year and \$2M last year. There has been an increased need for Facilitated Enrollment in light of the pandemic. In 2021, WDI distributed 350 applications to eligible Erie County families that resulted in the enrollment of over 200 new children. In 2021, the program served a total of 304 families compared to a total of 226 families in 2020, representing a 35% increase in enrollment. **We are asking the State Senate to continue to support the Erie County Facilitated Enrollment fund for \$2M to ensure that children and families throughout WNY continue to receive much-needed support, and promote economic development throughout the region.**

Additionally, the Empire State Child Care Campaign and Winning BeginningNY for which WNY Women's Foundation provides leadership have advanced bold proposals that support the NYS Child Care Availability Task Force report recommendations moving our State towards Universal Child Care – addressing the racial, socioeconomic and gendered discriminatory processes of the current system. As a champion for quality, affordable child care, we look forward to engaging you in the review of and support for these proposals to support parents, child care providers (most black and brown women), child care small businesses (primarily women-owned) and our next generation workforce – our children.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and for being a continued champion for our families. In order to restart our economy, we need to ensure that parents can go back to work and have accessible, quality care for their children. We seek to support economic empowerment of working parents in WNY and throughout NYS, and help children access the quality child care experience that they need to grow into productive adults.

Sincerely,

Sheri L. Scavone

Sheri Scavone, CEO
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cc. WNY NYS Delegation