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**Testimony Before the New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare and
Committee on Women's Issues
Regarding the ACS EarlyLearn NYC Concept Paper and Request for Proposals**

April 28, 2010

Good afternoon. Thank you Chair Palma and Chair Ferreras and members of the General Welfare Committee and Women's Issues Committee for convening this hearing and for the opportunity to testify. My name is Gregory Brender and I am here on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses where I serve as a policy analyst. As you know, United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is the membership organization of New York City settlement houses and community centers. Rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement, UNH promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. UNH's membership comprises one of the largest human service systems in New York City, with 38 agencies working at more than 400 sites to provide high quality services and activities to half million New Yorkers each year. UNH supports its members through policy development, advocacy and capacity-building activities. UNH members have a strong commitment to early childhood education and provide Child Care, Early Head Start, Head Start, Family Child Care Networks and Universal Pre-Kindergarten.

For too long, ACS has been forced to make Early Education policy by responding to budget cuts. We are encouraged that despite the continued budget challenges that ACS faces, the agency is working to improve educational standards and parent access to quality child care through the next RFP. In this concept paper, ACS seeks to reorient and rebrand New York City's funded early learning system by emphasizing blended funding models, geographic realignment and socio-economically integrated classrooms. The Concept Paper envisions a child care system that is more coherent, easier for parents to navigate and provides comprehensive, quality, services to more families.

UNH is working with early childhood education providers in our member agencies to develop a complete response to the EarlyLearn NYC concept paper which we will share with you. At this hearing I would like to concentrate on five topics in the ACS Concept Paper: capacity, per child funding, assessment and enrollment, the role of Family Child Care Networks and eligible providers.

Capacity

Although the EarlyLearn NYC Concept Paper does not project the number of children expected to be served, it does appear that, under the conditions outlined, that New York City will support fewer subsidized slots after the issuance of the EarlyLearn NYC RFP. One of our major concerns with the concept paper is the lack of information about what funding will be available to serve even current ACS children. We hope that the administration and the City Council will work together to increase access to early childhood education for more, not fewer, children.

First, it appears likely that individual centers will experience a loss of capacity in order to accommodate private pay children. Centers serving neighborhoods which ACS does not designate as high need may have many fewer subsidized slots. In many cases, these centers are already operating fully enrolled and even have waiting lists which are sometimes more than twice as high as the total capacity of the center. While we support integrating ACS classrooms with private pay children, this should not come at the expense of fewer available slots for subsidy-eligible children. ACS should consider a center's enrollment history, as well as its location, so that low-income children who need services in neighborhoods that are not designated as high needs can continue to receive care and education.

We are also concerned about the overall capacity of the system, which currently is able to serve less than 30% of subsidy eligible children. Many UNH member agencies and other child care providers have waiting lists filled with eligible children. We need to create additional, not less, capacity to serve these children and their families.

Per Child Funding

We are encouraged by the EarlyLearn NYC concept paper's support for the expansion of blended funding programs, which combine funds from City, State and Federal sources and offer the benefits of three distinct funding streams- Child Care, Head Start and Universal Pre-Kindergarten. In fact, three UNH member agencies, Hudson Guild, University Settlement and East Side House, developed the first models for collaborative classrooms in the 1990's which combined child Care with Head Start and later Universal Pre-Kindergarten. When fully funded, blended programs can provide more resources for children and their families than stand alone programs can.

For example, all three models in the EarlyLearn NYC Concept Paper, require programs to enroll all their 4 year old children in Universal Pre-Kindergarten. New York State currently funds most Universal Pre-Kindergarten slots for only 2.5 hours a day, making the program inaccessible to children of working parents. To provide a full day of care to four year olds in UPK, ACS providers offer UPK to the children of working parents by blending funding from both UPK and ACS child care to create a program which meets the specific educational requirements of UPK while providing a full day of care. UPK programs must adhere to educational standards which include:

- Employing staff and program directors who are either New York State certified teachers or working towards certification.
- Meeting curriculum standards aligned with State and local learning standards.
- Providing ongoing assessments of each child's language development, cognitive skills, and social development.

- Providing health and nutritional screening for each child.

Similarly, two of the three models in the EarlyLearn NYC concept Paper require providers to offer Head Start programs. Head Start programs require:

- Family workers to provide counseling, support and referrals to families of children in care.
- A nurse and nutrition consultant.
- Parent meetings and advisory councils for parents and community members.

We believe that all children benefit from these programs and should have access to these services. To do so, ACS must set per child rates which enable providers to meet the highest standards of every funding stream used.

Last year, many blended funding programs received budget cuts through the ACS “cost allocation” process. ACS removed Child Care and Head Start funds from programs which incorporated UPK into their classrooms. These cuts forced providers to eliminate parts of the UPK programs such as art, music, movement and drama that are frequently offered in programs only funded through UPK. We hope the current ACS plan does not result in further per child funding reductions.

Assessment and Enrollment

It is encouraging that the Early Learn NYC Concept Paper announces that ACS is working with DOE and DOHMH on a Unified Assessment System. Currently, providers who operate blended funding programs often send information and complete separate paperwork for DOE and ACS. Providers who offer classes that use a combination of Head Start, Child Care and UPK, which Model 1 providers would do in the Early Learn NYC Concept Paper, often have to submit paperwork twice to ACS and then to DOE. This is costly at a time when early education budgets are thin.

Moreover, many providers report being told that they need to make a change, such as moving a piece of furniture by an ACS consultant, only to learn from a DOE consultant that the required change is not in compliance with DOE regulations. We hope that a unified assessment system will prevent this sort of confusion.

Similarly, we hope that ACS will work to align enrollment procedures so that children whose care and education is funded by multiple sources do not need to be enrolled multiple times.

Family Child Care Networks

Several UNH members operate Family Child Care networks which provide services such as:

- Conducting home visits to ensure that health and safety of the homes in which providers serve children.
- Establishing and assisting with the implementation of developmentally appropriate activities
- Maintaining and tracking children’s health records in accordance with ACS and DOHMH requirements.

- Helping providers to access Federal CACFP funds for children’s meals and conducting site visits to ensure compliance with CACFP nutritional guidelines.
- Conducting eligibility intake and enrollment
- Providing ongoing training and recruitment.
- Assisting with licensing and re-certification forms.
- Assisting with administration.

The EarlyLearn NYC Concept Paper emphasizes the importance of Family Child Care Networks in providing care for infants and toddlers, as well as 3 year old children. Given the need for infant and toddler care and the lack of capital funds available to make the renovations necessary to build new infant toddler classrooms, we believe that Family Child Care Networks will be essential to meeting the needs of this largely underserved population.

However, the EarlyLearn NYC Concept Paper also proposes several new requirements for Family Child Care Networks which may make it difficult to find bidders in many neighborhoods. These include:

- **Center based requirement.** The EarlyLearn NYC concept paper states “To be awarded a Home-Based Care network contract, the proposer must also be offering services in a center based setting.”¹ This is a new requirement and many existing family child care networks will not be eligible to apply.
- **Age requirements.** Currently family child care networks are able to serve children from 6 weeks old through 13 years old. The Concept Paper will limit Family Child Care networks to serving children from 6 weeks old through *3 years old*.
- **Minimum children served.** The EarlyLearn NYC Concept Paper requires Family Child Care Networks to serve a minimum of 200 children. This is significantly more than many networks currently serve. As the EarlyLearn NYC Concept Paper does not propose an expansion of Family Child Care Capacity, this would appear to lead to a reduction in the number of family child care networks.

In order to ensure that there is a sufficient number of quality services available for infants and toddlers we propose allowing Family Child Care Networks to apply for separate contracts and demonstrate that they have a link to one or more center based programs without requiring that they run a center themselves. We also propose that ACS suggest but not require that all Family Child Care networks serve a minimum of 200 children.

Eligible Providers

We believe that the EarlyLearn NYC RFP should continue the current requirement that eligible program providers be 501(c)3 not for profit corporations. The first goal of government funded providers must be the care and education of young children. The availability and continuity of a child’s early education should not be dependent on a provider’s ability to profit from their services.

¹ Concept Paper for EarlyLearn NYC: New York City’s Early Care and Education Services. New York City Administration for Children’s Services, 7

Moreover, it is difficult to understand how a for-profit corporation would earn a profit as an ACS contractor. Already, many UNH providers supplement their ACS contracts with private fundraising or with other funds. Essentially, they accept a loss in order to provide ACS contracted care. The EarlyLearn NYC RFP will require that providers contribute to the cost of care through a match requirement that the concept paper anticipates will put \$30.9 million into the RFP.

We are concerned that given the sometimes unpredictable financial challenges involved in providing Early Childhood Education in New York City that for profit organizations will not keep slots which they have been awarded when there is an opportunity to enroll a private pay student.

Thank you again for convening this hearing and for the opportunity to testify. The City Council will play a crucial role in shaping the future of early childhood education in New York City. Both your work providing oversight on policy matters and your work in negotiating the City budget will be crucial in determining the success of New York City's early childhood education system. In order to realize some of the best aspects of the EarlyLearn NYC proposal and to correct some of the biggest problems in the proposal, adequate funding of early childhood education is essential. We look forward to working with the administration and with the City Council to ensure that the aspirations of this proposal will be realized for the youngest New Yorkers.

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UNH Members: Arab American Family Support Center - BronxWorks - CAMBA - Center for Family Life in Sunset Park - Chinese American Planning Council - Claremont Neighborhood Centers - Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation - East Side House Settlement - Educational Alliance - Goddard Riverside Community Center - Grand Street Settlement - Greenwich House - Hamilton-Madison House - Hartley House - Henry Street Settlement - Hudson Guild - Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House - Kingsbridge Heights Community Center - Lenox Hill Neighborhood House - Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center - Mosholu Montefiore Community - New Settlement Apartments - Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation - Project Hospitality - Queens Community House - Riverdale Neighborhood House - SCAN New York - School Settlement Association - Shorefront YM-WHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach, Inc - Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Centers - St. Matthew's and St. Timothy's Neighborhood Center - St. Nick's Alliance - Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center - Sunnyside Community Services - Third Street Music School Settlement - Union Settlement Association-United Community Centers - University Settlement Society