

184 ELDRIDGE STREET NEW YORK NY 10002 212–453–4555 UNIVERSITYSETTLEMENT.ORG Testimony of University Settlement before the New York City Council

Preliminary Budget Hearing

Committee on Education, Chair Rita Joseph

Submitted by Anjini Ramnarine, Director of the Family Child Care Network University Settlement

March 18, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Anjini Ramnarine, and I am the Director of the Family Child Care Network at University Settlement.

Every year, University Settlement partners with 40,000 New Yorkers on the Lower East Side and in Brooklyn to build on their strengths as they achieve healthy, stable, and remarkable lives. For 135 years, we've collaborated with our communities to pioneer highly effective programs that fight poverty and systemic inequality.

Family childcare (FCC) providers are integral to the childcare system in NYC, yet too often, FCCs are left out of the conversation. FCCs often serve working class, immigrant families who need more flexible hours and search for childcare that can reflect the cultural expectations or languages spoken at home.

University Settlement is one of many community-based organizations that help support a network of FCC providers. Our network of 51 providers offers full-day care for over 300 children ranging from infants to 4-yearolds, across the Lower East Side, Washington Heights, and Brooklyn.

Our licensed, experienced home-based providers implement a high-quality educational curriculum. Families receive comprehensive services, including developmental assessments, educational workshops, and familycentered community events. Services are offered in English, Spanish, and Chinese.

FCCs have different needs than early childhood centers, but unfortunately, thus far, the DOE has attempted a one-size-fit-all approach to requirements and trainings that have frustrated our providers and broken their trust in the DOE.

For example, the move to the new curriculum, Creative Curriculum,



184 ELDRIDGE STREET NEW YORK NY 10002 212–453–4555 UNIVERSITYSETTLEMENT.ORG requires different curriculum for different ages. While this may make sense for centers, where there are classrooms of children of different ages with multiple staff to lead these separate classrooms, FCCs are often run by one main caregiver with no additional staff and serve children of multiple ages. They need a curriculum that reflects how they are teaching and caring for mixed ages.

FCCs are not given the resources to support the DOE's curricular expectations. FCCs are all individual businesses, and they are given a daily rate, which barely covers their business costs. Any additional materials required comes out of their daily rate, and this includes any materials needed for children with special needs. Though we appreciate the compensation rates were recently increased, they still do not match the costs or the increased requirements from the DOE, which is a major reason why we are losing providers.

FCCs are also not given resources for appropriate training or advanced notice or explanation for changing requirements.

Finally, FCC providers have never had an opportunity to talk to DOE about these changes. Childcare is not one-size-fit-all, and the family childcare providers and networks need a seat at the table for decision-making. All partnerships need to have a level of trust, and the DOE's lack of transparency leads to networks losing the trust of our providers and families.

On the family-centered side, our experience is that families are still struggling to use the MyCity portal. We, along with other FCC Networks, continue to submit applications through the manual system because MyCity is not user-friendly and therefore difficult for families to navigate. While we appreciate that the city has attempted to offer the portal in multiple languages, the translations are insufficient and unclear. Families are often offered options that they are not eligible for, which leads to confusion and frustration.

We were excited for MyCity to reduce the amount of time and back-andforth that our Family Workers spend guiding families through the application, but we have found that it has been less time-intensive to revert to the older, manual system because MyCity does not tell families why their application is rejected or what the application status is. We have often had to completely redo applications that families have submitted through MyCity, which takes time and delays the process.

MyCity needs to provide a clearer explanation of what families are eligible for, a way to track the application, and the reasons behind application rejections.

Beyond the Family Childcare Network, we join other organizations in calling for salary parity for early childhood educators and the restoration of \$170 million cuts to early childhood education. As living costs escalate in NYC, this is a time when we need to invest in our City's childcare system, not divest. NYC needs to be affordable for all families, no matter their income level, and currently childcare is unaffordable to almost everyone but the very wealthy. This means that families are stretched thin,



184 ELDRIDGE STREET NEW YORK NY 10002 212-453-4555 UNIVERSITYSETTLEMENT.ORG parents are making difficult choices, and we are losing the working people who make NYC run.

The DOE budgets fund the bare minimum across the board. University Settlement provides broad, necessary support because we use other fundraising to bring Mental Health and Special Needs coordination to our students, not because it's built into the city budget.

We also urge the Council to pass CM Stevens' prevailing wage legislation, which would require City agencies to include sufficient funding to cover those wages in contracts, and track implementation of those wages by human service contractors, and fully fund it in the FY25 Budget to limit impacts to programs.

Thank you for your time. You can reach me at <u>aramnarine@universitysettlement.org</u> if you have further questions.