



Public Hearing of the Senate Committee on
Children & Families on the
Child Care Crisis in New York State
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Thank you, Chairman Jabari Brisport and members of the New York State Senate Committee on Children & Families, for the opportunity to testify at this public hearing today. My name is Leslie Capello and I am the Senior Director for QUALITYstarsNY. Established in 2010, QUALITYstarsNY is New York State's Quality Rating & Improvement System (QRIS) for early childhood programs. As the state's QRIS, QUALITYstarsNY is designed to systematically increase and sustain the quality of early childhood programs in all regulated settings – this includes child care centers, school-based pre-k, and family child care providers – across New York State.

QUALITYstarsNY is actively working to ameliorate crises impacting New York's early childhood system for both families and the workforce. We currently support more than 1,100 early childhood programs that serve more than 65,000 children from birth to age five across all ten economic development regions of New York State.

Increasing High Quality Child Care Opportunities

Research tells us that early childhood education has a myriad of benefits that set children up for success in school and in life, but only if the program is high quality. With the integral connection between quality and resulting lifelong benefits of early childhood education, providers should not have to forgo quality improvement to simply stay afloat within a child care system in which they are strained and overwhelmed. Programs participating in QUALITYstarsNY receive the individualized support they need to identify opportunities for improvement, then access the resources and guidance to create high quality early learning experiences.

QUALITYstarsNY requests an increase in annual funding from \$5 million to \$20 million in the New York State budget to provide the essential support and investments early childhood programs need to increase and sustain their quality.

Expanding QUALITYstarsNY is one of the recommendations released in the [New York State Child Care Availability Task Force report](#) as part of their vision for ensuring high quality child care. As the state's QRIS, QUALITYstarsNY safeguards New York's multi-billion dollar state and federal investments in early learning by providing quality assurance and accountability for less than \$300 per child.

All families regardless of where they live in the state, deserve access to high quality early learning experiences. New York State owes it to our young children, families, and the early childhood workforce,

to ensure that policies are both enhancing access and affordability while investing in each program's commitment to increasing and sustaining high quality practices.

With current funding, QUALITYstarsNY focuses on supporting programs in underserved communities, those serving infants and toddlers, multi-language learners, and those receiving child care subsidies. In addition to these priorities, QUALITYstarsNY collaborates with the Office of Children and Families to serve the Child Care Deserts Grant awardees.

The QUALITYstarsNY Model

QUALITYstarsNY uses research-based [Quality Standards](#), developed by a diverse group of state experts in early childhood, as the framework for our model of continuous quality improvement. Representing best practices and policies in early childhood education, the QUALITYstarsNY Standards are used to assess program quality on a 5-Star scale and serve as a roadmap for the creation and funding of a program's Quality Improvement Plan.

To enhance and sustain their program quality, and in turn, earn higher Star Ratings, participating programs receive access to:

- One-on-one guidance from a Quality Improvement Specialist with expertise in early childhood education and program management;
- Data-driven assessment through the rating process to inform their Quality Improvement Planning and ensure accountability for investments in their program's quality;
- Materials and furnishings to enhance their learning environment; and
- Professional development for staff to deepen their practice and knowledge so they can best create high quality early learning experiences.

Most importantly, QUALITYstarsNY's model has been proven effective. After three years of continuous quality improvement work with QUALITYstarsNY, programs are re-rated to assess their progress. This progress is measured in points leading to star level increases. **Among re-rated programs, 70% increased their Star Rating or sustained a high quality rating of 3, 4 or 5 Stars.** Almost all of the remaining programs earned significantly more points, which eventually leads to increased star levels.

Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce

The early childhood workforce is historically underpaid and unsupported. QUALITYstarsNY has increased accessibility to professional development, helping thousands of educators and administrators grow as professionals. The scholarship programs support this essential workforce in pursuing early childhood degrees and advanced credentials, which they could not afford otherwise.

At the height of the pandemic, QUALITYstarsNY created and facilitated sessions to guide the re-opening of early care and education programs across the state. These sessions were attended by over 2,500 professionals from participating programs as well as many other direct service administrators and their staff.

FY 2023-2024 NYS Budget Request - Sustaining the Growth of QUALITYstarsNY

In 2021, the state allocated \$35 million in funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) to support the growth of QUALITYstarsNY over three years, and we thank the state legislature for this historic investment. These funds allowed us to provide the support early childhood programs so desperately needed during the pandemic, and now, as we take steps toward recovery as a state.

As one of our family child care participants in Brooklyn told her QUALITYstarsNY Quality Improvement Specialist “I believe during these times of uncertainty is when our Quality Improvement Specialist is most needed. We need a source of support, to reinforce and remind us to continue our best practices no matter how tough our adjustments may be.”

With the ARPA funds, QUALITYstarsNY will be able to more than double in size and serve 2,250 early childhood programs. However, we cannot stop there. The new programs QUALITYstarsNY is currently expanding to support will continue to need our services in the years to come, as will many additional programs, in order to ensure families have increased access to high quality child care across the state. The gains and expansion that this unprecedented funding has provided need to be supported. The \$5 million annual funding that QUALITYstarsNY has been allocated in the NYS state budget since 2017 must be increased if the state is to safeguard program quality as policies are implemented to expand access and affordability for families. With the ongoing expansion of the child care subsidy system, QUALITYstarsNY is needed more than ever to support programs and providers in historically underserved communities.

QUALITYstarsNY requests an increase in annual funding from \$5 million to \$20 million in the New York State budget to build a foundation for long-term growth and ensure more early childhood programs, and the families they serve, can benefit from the comprehensive services that QUALITYstarsNY provides to support program quality.
