

Public Testimony
Presented by Shaun Elliott
Greater Philadelphia YMCA
400 Fayette Street, Suite 250
Conshohocken, PA 19428

**Testimony for Public Hearing on the PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning's (OCDEL) Child Care Certification Regulation Rewrite Project
PA House Children and Youth Committee
October 25, 2022**

Good morning Chairs Delozier and DeLissio and members of the Pennsylvania House Children and Youth Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this morning on the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning's (OCDEL) Child Care certification regulation rewrite project.

YMCA's collectively represent the largest childcare provider in the Commonwealth. I am here today representing the Greater Philadelphia YMCA, as President & CEO, and the Pennsylvania State Alliance of YMCAs, as Chairman of the Public Policy Committee.

We are pleased to share that the child care regulation rewrite process has been transparent and inclusive. It has been evident from the first announcement of the rewrite that OCDEL has been intentional in its efforts to pull stakeholders into the process as partners and to work with them to ensure that the new regulations help, not hinder their ability to deliver high quality, affordable child care programs. We hope this dialogue will continue.

The decision to release a preliminary draft of the rewrite was greatly appreciated as it afforded Ys and other stakeholders to see the direction OCDEL was taking and to identify any "red flags" of concern. For example, we detected proposed language that would have resulted in significant new costs and potential disruptions of critical Y programs. OCDEL responded quickly by assuring us that the intention was not to create those problems and the language would be changed accordingly.

We continue to urge OCDEL, and ultimately, the members of this committee which will eventually review the proposed regulations, to recognize the existing child care staffing crisis facing all child care providers in Pennsylvania.

Earlier this year, Start Strong PA completed a Child Care Staffing Crisis survey. Ninety-one percent (91%) of responding providers indicated that they face a child care staffing crisis. The results are alarming. Providers had thousands open staff positions resulting in the closing of thousands classrooms. If these classrooms were fully open, the survey indicated that tens of thousands of children could be served. The Waiting List statewide was in excess of tens of

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thousands children. These data are alarming and will continue to pose an economic threat to families, communities and the entire Commonwealth.

Additional Challenges include:

1. Recruiting and retaining staff

- a. We have waitlists and rooms that we cannot open because we cannot staff the program;
- b. Educational requirements for staff significantly limit our applicant pool;
- c. We cannot afford to pay a competitive wage, without passing an even higher free onto our families:
 - i. Child care teachers with degrees can find higher pay and benefits working in the k-12 school system.
 - ii. The average child care teacher is paid 22% less than teachers with similar degrees working in school district Kindergarten classrooms.
 - iii. Child care pay is so low that 50% of child care professionals qualify to receive government benefits.
- d. ARPA funding has been helpful, but is not a long term solution for sustainability for the industry that working parents rely on.

2. Highly regulated and cumbersome administrative requirements:

- a. Current examples include:
 - i. Wet signatures from parents on all documents
 - ii. Staff educational requirements
 - iii. Multi-use of licensed space during non-program hours
 - iv. Needing a copy of the proof of purchase of a fire system (very hard with public schools, where many centers are located)

3. Difficult for families to navigate care options and funded program opportunities

- a. Philly Pre-K v Head Start v Pre K Counts
 - i. If you add wrap around care, that adds another layer;
 - ii. If you receive ELRC for wrap around care, that must be navigated; and
 - iii. If you receive Y financial assistance for the part of wrap around care that is not covered by ELRC, there is an additional layer.

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- iv. So, we are making it the hardest for the families that need the most support. We are happy to help families navigate the process to help alleviate the administrative burden.
- b. Reimbursement for the funded programs does not always cover the true cost of care but funding streams cannot be combined to support the full cost

In my remaining time, I would like to share two very impactful stories from parents.

Impact Story One:

My name is Alyssa Schatz. My husband and I, working parents of 2 kids aged 6 & 13, reside in Mount Airy, Philadelphia. While we both are fortunate to have good jobs, the cost of childcare is our largest bill, with full time care surpassing our mortgage. To that end, we are thankful for the Philadelphia free Pre K program which has made childcare more affordable but I just can't imagine how families with fewer resources are able to manage this expense. It would have cost our family roughly \$35,000 a year to have them in full time care so that we could work. The overwhelming majority of Pennsylvania families simply cannot afford that. Quality, safe childcare supports parents in their careers, children in their social, emotional, and academic development, and stimulates our economy.

Despite the high cost of childcare, childcare workers commit to difficult jobs that require higher education and long hours. We have been amazed to see the leaps and gains my daughter has made in reading, writing, and math in just a few short weeks in Pre K, however, the people who supported her are not being paid in a way that illustrates the incredible value they lend. In a situation like this, when even relatively affluent families find the cost difficult to manage and high quality workers are severely underpaid, it's clear that we as a society must step in to support necessary services that benefit us all. What could be a more valuable investment than our children?"

Impact Story Two:

My name is Morgan Rakay. I am the mother of two beautiful children ages 2 and 4 who attend daycare and Pre-K at our local YMCA. My husband and I both have advanced degrees and, as mental health professionals, are well-versed in understanding "the system." Yet, when I was

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faced with navigating affordable pre-k and childcare, we were overwhelmed with the number of avenues for application, financial support, and deadlines.

I was our sole income and primary parent while my husband completed 5 years of medical school. During this time, our financial situation was tenuous at best, and assistance programs kept us afloat. It was a demoralizing time, especially as we realized how often we were cut off from preferred or best-available medical care. We were treated differently when we showed an ACCESS card, and generally expected to be two steps ahead of application processes that I had to take time off work just to complete. Let me be clear, we are privileged as a family and will recover from what was an incredibly difficult time. But as our recovery process begins, I empathize with Pennsylvania families who are not as fortunate.

Receiving the call that our 4 year old had secured a spot in a free pre-k classroom was initially a relief. I completed the paperwork immediately, then received a follow up email: "Just a quick question. For the income section, is (that) the total made for the whole household? If so, you would qualify for our Pre-K Counts classroom." That short, simple email sent me down a rabbit hole of additional questions, more paperwork, and increased scrutiny, just for needing support. What struck me more than the frustration around that was the added indignity of knowing our child would be in a segregated classroom based on income. I understand that different sources of funding and program oversight create these situations, yet my response to being set apart once again was visceral and I almost walked around from the support I desperately needed. And, after it was too late, I stumbled across other financial assistance options that we could have applied for.

I can't help but feel that this tangled system is undermining its own stated intentions. It segregates families based on income instead of integrating quality childcare. It is challenging enough to navigate that it debilitates access for those who need it most. It dangles the carrot of free or subsidized childcare that is ultimately not enough to give a parent a full work day. We have every hope and belief that it could be better.

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In closing, we ask members of this Committee and OCDEL to consider ways to alleviate the administrative burden; examine the staff educational requirements to allow more candidates to be considered and more classrooms to operate; and provide consistent, significant investment in child care which is needed to support the sustainability of the industry and support the working families who rely on child care providers. One-time funding – although appreciated – does not allow centers to plan and implement the investments needed in wage structures and center maintenance.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.