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COMMUNITY

Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.
Testimony at the New York State Senate Committee on Education Hearing
Honorable John Liu, Chair
March 15th, 2019

Thank you, Chair Liu, and the members of the State Senate Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify today. I am Wayne Ho, the President and CEO of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc. (CPC). The mission of CPC is to promote the social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community & economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 60,000 people each year in all five boroughs of New York City through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can promote social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the vision of advancing and transforming communities.

Additionally, we serve over 300 low-income children and families each year through our early childhood education programs as well as over 5,800 students and families each year through our educational programs. To that end, we are grateful to testify about school accountability and governance issues that impact these children and families as well as the staff who serve them.

As we consider the extension of Mayoral Control of New York City's public schools, we consider the future of over 1.1 million public school students, including the nearly 183,000 Asian American public school students. Mayoral Control has created clear leadership structures and allowed the City to make critical decisions about our public school students.

Mayoral Control is important because it promotes accountability, and one key example of accountability is how early childhood education is implemented in New York City. As the City embarks on an effort to transform the entire City's early childhood education system – from Universal Pre-Kindergarten for four-year-olds and three-year-olds to subsidized early education for infants and toddlers – **we must take some serious issues into consideration as we weigh the extension of Mayoral Control.**

As early childhood educators who are proud to continue supporting our city's youngest residents for the rest of their lives, settlement houses like CPC broadly support and applaud the effort to expand access to Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) and create a seamless birth-to-five early childhood education system through placing it all under the umbrella of the NYC Department of Education (DOE). Yet we have grave concerns about the Request for Proposals (RFPs) that were recently released for early childhood programs, which suggests that this transition is not seizing the opportunity to right some serious disparities in the sector.

Community-based organizations like CPC provide nearly 60 percent of all seats for UPK and offer all subsidy-eligible care for infants, toddlers, and 3 year olds. Furthermore, city early

education efforts are being positioned nationally as successful and yet, the needs of organizations and individuals that drive this important work are being ignored.

The early childhood workforce in community based organizations provide care and education to children throughout New York City including many of the City's poorest children, and many children whose classes are their first introduction to the English language. Yet the teachers that are charged with providing these linguistic and developmental foundations are paid much less than their similarly qualified counterparts in public schools. The salary disparities are stark and grow over time. The unified system that the Mayor has called for cannot be truly or effectively unified if salary disparities are not addressed. For New York City's early childhood educators, whether you work in a publicly-funded community-based organization or in a public school determines how much you earn. **The Director of one of our early childhood centers, who has been with CPC for over 40 years, earns less than a first year DOE teacher does.**

For example, a certified head teacher in a three-year old classroom in a community based organization has a starting salary of \$46,920 while a certified teacher in a public school starts at \$61,894. After time, these disparities grow wider. With eight years of experience, a public school teachers' annual salary will have grown to slightly over \$81,042 while a teacher in a community based program will be earning just \$48,920. And CBO teachers work longer hours since community based programs are open during the summer. Salary disparities cause instability for programs who lose staff who cannot afford to stay at their jobs. This impacts the families we serve who need the services provided in community based organizations.

Our teachers across six early childhood education centers work incredibly hard to provide high quality, culturally competent, linguistically sensitive programming for the children they serve. In our Queens-based Lois E. Lee Early Childhood Education Center, for example, we do dual language reading in eight different languages. Not just serving the children, these teachers help the parents with language access to critical information about how the school system works and how to best support their children. Yet these teachers make so much less for the great work that they do, and as costs of living increase, it becomes harder and harder for us to keep them.

This is an outrage and the moment is now, while we are considering extending Mayoral Control and while we are transitioning the entire system, for the City to rectify this wrong and build a solid foundation for a truly integrated birth to five early education system. **Mayoral Control should mean that immediate action should be taken to achieve salary parity for the early childhood workforce in order to ensure a quality education for all New York City's children.**

This brings us to another critical point, which are the non-profit organizations that would love to pay their well-deserving staff competitive wages, but have contracts that are so deeply underfunded that they are in danger of insolvency. These new early childhood RFPs only perpetuate the chronic underfunding of the human services sector.

The RFPs set overall funding at \$11-12,000 per child for "core day and year," and unspecified "additional funding" for "extended day and year" slots. While the RFP says that "average per-child funding will meet or exceed the average amounts currently provided to ACS-contracted programs," the average rates that are currently provided are deeply inadequate to deliver the services required. United Neighborhood Houses' "Closing the Gap" report demonstrates that there is a 41% underfunding on current contracts, so pegging any new contracts to previous rates would serve only to perpetuate this underfunding. Even worse, funding is set for the entire eight-year contract period. While rent, utilities, insurance, cost of living, and other program

costs will surely escalate over the life of the eight-year contract, our funding would not. This means that an already inadequate rate would become increasingly inadequate over the life of the contract.

Furthermore, payments in the new RFP are based on monthly enrollment, meaning that funding will drop significantly from July through October, as children graduate from or otherwise move out of programs, until new children can be brought on board. Because organizations have broadly fixed costs month to month, and certainly could not reduce costs through laying off staff, getting rent abatements, or reducing utility and insurance costs, it means that organizations would suffer significant financial loss during low enrollment months. **Mayoral Control should mean that the DOE fulfills the Mayor's vision of New York City being the fairest big city in the nation by fairly treating community-based organizations providing early childhood and school-based programs.**

Additionally, 3K for All will be expanded to 14 neighborhoods under this RFP. None of the 14 neighborhoods are ones that have a predominantly Asian American community. This means that the City's fastest growing community will not benefit from 3K for All. According to the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, Asian Americans have the highest rate of poverty of any racial group (26%). Early childhood education supports not only the development of children but also the economic opportunity of parents, and the planned expansion of 3K for All leaves out Asian American children and parents. **Mayoral Control should mean that the expansion of any DOE program should be fully inclusive of the City's fastest growing community.**

Lastly, community-based organizations develop partnerships with the City of New York through contracts with city agencies. Over \$4 billion a year is contracted out each year to community-based organizations to provide human services, and similar funding is contracted each year through the DOE. While the City's human services agencies (such as that Administration for Children's Services, Department of Homeless Services, Department of Youth and Community Development, Department for the Aging, etc.) have been part of the Nonprofit Resiliency Committee (NRC), the DOE has not fully engaged with this effort to improve the City's procurement system. Through the NRC, progress has been made to ensure that community-based organizations get cash advances, higher indirect rates, streamlined budget modifications, and other systemic improvements on human services contracts. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for DOE contracts. **Mayoral Control should mean that there is one contractual and procurement system for community-based organizations that serve the most marginalized of all New Yorkers.**

In order for any transition of our early childhood programs to successfully create a seamless education system for our youngest New Yorkers, we must 1) **prioritize contracts for community based organizations that achieve salary parity for the workforce, 2) ensure that the full costs of providing high quality programs are included, with yearly cost escalators, 3) include the Asian American community in any expansion efforts, and 4) align contracting reforms across all City agencies.** These are urgent issues, and it is far past time to take action on them.

The Mayor has the opportunity to maintain Mayoral Control of public schools, continue his strong leadership on early education, and right historic wrongs to the nonprofit sector that is entrusted with making sure our youngest residents get a strong start.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. If you would like further information, please feel free to contact me at who@cpc-nyc.org or 212-941-0920 x 143.