



**Testimony of Linda Rosenthal,  
Director of Early Childhood Educational Services  
for New York City Council  
Committee on Finance  
Re: Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget**

**May 25, 2021**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the proposed Executive Budget. My name is Linda Rosenthal and I am Director of Early Childhood Educational Services for Volunteers of America-Greater New York. I oversee the Bronx Early Learning Center, a 4410 preschool special education program for children with significant developmental delays/disabilities, which is approved by the New York State Education Department and under contract with the New York City Department of Education to provide multidisciplinary evaluations, special education services and therapeutic services to preschool students with disabilities. We are not a private school, and we serve New York City's students.

I am here today to ask that the executive budget include salary increases for the teachers in the 4410 preschool special education programs. Under the city's salary parity agreement, this is only fair. Currently, there is a big gap in pay between public school teachers and the teachers at community-based organizations such as our early childhood program. The very real concern is that our teachers, who until now have remained with our programs out of dedication to our children and families, will be forced to leave for the far higher-paying public schools Headstart and childcare positions in response to the realities of their own life's needs. This will be tragic. This will also be unfair to our students who deserve to have a New York State Certified teacher, as well the students attending all other early childhood programs in New York City.

A number of CBOs, which operate the majority of preschool special education programs in New York City—have closed due to insufficient funding or have converted their programming to school-age classes. These CBO program are equipped to address the significant issues with which these students present and are best able to provide the mandated services on a child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Parents become alarmed/concerned when their young child, whose developmental milestones are delayed and perhaps their child has received a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, and this realization can throw families into a tailspin. When advised by their local school district to enroll their child in a preschool special education program as quickly as possible, desperate parents worry they are missing their time-limited opportunity to give their child the best possible chance of building a foundation for success in school and in life if the local public school's Three-K or Pre-K for all classrooms are not equipped to meet the child's needs.

That's where CBO preschool special education programs like ours come in. VOA-Greater New York has been in the preschool special education field since the mid 1980s. Our teachers are skilled and dually certified in special education *and* early childhood education. This dual certification is not a requirement for the NYCDOE teachers.

When our preschool children graduate, they are placed into the least restrictive environment possible. Children who attend preschool special education programs such as ours are prepared and do well during their school age years.

ALL children deserve New York State certified teachers. Our teachers in the 4410 preschool special education programs are not being treated equitably, and are forced to leave our programs for higher paying positions. While the City has made strides toward salary parity for CBO early childhood educators working in child care centers and Head Start Programs, teachers working in CBO preschool special education programs were not included. As a result, effective October 2021, CBO preschool special education teachers will now be the lowest-paid teachers in the City – including \$20,000 less than Headstart and childcare teachers, despite serving some of the City’s highest-need students. If our teachers leave, and we must close our doors, the children will have to attend the public schools which may not have the space or expertise to absorb these thousands of students into their local Three-K and Pre-K for All classrooms.

The City must extend salary parity to teachers of CBO preschool special programs so they may continue to support preschool students with disabilities. On behalf of Volunteers of America-Greater New York and the Bronx Early Learning Center, we thank Council Member Treyger, Chairman Drumm, and members of the City Council Finance Committee, for your support.