



**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Education
Budget Hearing, FY 2023
March 21, 2022**

Introduction and Thanks:

My name is Linda Rosenthal, and I am the Director of Early Childhood Educational Services at the Volunteers of America-Greater New York Bronx Early Learning Center. I would like to thank Chair Joseph and the members of this Committee for the opportunity to submit the following testimony.

About Us:

VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York by 2050 through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's largest human service providers, impacting more than 11,000 adults and children annually through 66 programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester County. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio of award-winning permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline.

Testimony:

The Bronx Early Learning Center is a preschool special education (4410) program 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 related services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy and counseling.

The 4410 preschool special education programs are publicly funded programs, with tuition rates established by the New York State Education Department. We are not private schools, where parents pay tuition for their children's services. We serve New York City students, for whom the NYC DOE is unable to provide services, whether it be because of the significant challenges our students present with, lack of space, or the lack of expertise in working with our students.

All students, whether in special education classes or general education classes, are entitled to a certified teacher. At the present time, the teachers in 4410 programs receive salaries that are between \$30,000-\$36,000 less per year than teachers in public schools. When the City agreed to increase the salaries of 3-K and Pre-K general education teachers at community-based organizations two years ago, the 4410 preschool special education teachers were not included.

Today, 4410 programs such as ours are experiencing teacher shortages because sadly our teachers are leaving us for higher paying positions in the early childhood community. As our teachers continue to be recruited by the public schools, charter schools and community-based organizations with 3-K and Pre-K contracts with the NYC DOE, we are unable to serve preschool students with disabilities who are awaiting placement. At our 4410 program, there are three closed classrooms this school year because we have been unable to hire certified teaching staff.

Please ensure that the budget for fiscal year 2023 includes \$30 million to increase the salaries of preschool special education teachers serving New York City's children. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted by:

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