



**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Education
Oversight – Early Childhood Education Programs in NYC
October 19, 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 (VOA-GNY) Bronx Early Learning Center (BELC). I would like to thank Chair Joseph, as well as the other 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 the New York area 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 65 programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio of permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline.

Early Education Programs in NYC:

BELC is a preschool special education (4410) program approved by the New York State Education Department and under contract with the New York City Department of Education. With the dedication of our talented staff, it provides multidisciplinary evaluations, special education and related services, such as occupational, physical and speech therapy, and counseling.

The 4410 preschool special education programs are publicly funded, with tuition rates established by the New York State Education Department. We are not private schools, where parents pay tuition. We serve New York City students, for whom the NYC DOE is unable to provide adequate 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. Schools like BELC therefore play an extremely important role in serving these families.

On behalf of the 4410 preschool special education programs, we want to thank the City Council for including \$30 million in the City Council budget to address disparities in salaries between preschool special education teachers and staff at community-based organizations (i.e., childcare and Head Start) and their counterparts at the Department of Education sites. All students, whether in special education classes or general education classes, are entitled to a certified teacher.

Sadly, 4410 programs such as ours continue to experience teacher shortages because teachers depart for higher paying positions elsewhere in the early childhood field. 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 NYCDOE, we are unable to serve preschools students with disabilities who are awaiting placement. At our 4410 program, there are four closed classrooms this school year because we have been unable to hire certified teaching staff.

Please continue to fight to ensure that the budget continues to include money for teacher parity. The work we do at BELC, and the work being done at 4410 programs everywhere, is too important to our most vulnerable children for these issues to go unaddressed.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted by:

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