

Testimony before the Commission on Universal Pre-Kindergarten

September 30, 2015

Good afternoon and thank you. My name is Mary Graham, Executive Director at Children's Village, located in center city. As a professional in the field for 40 years, I cannot overstate that the single most important aspect of delivering quality universal PreK is **FUNDING**.

In Pennsylvania, we fund early childhood education in a number of ways. We have Child Care Works, a program for the working poor; Head Start and PA PreK Counts. Let's look at how much each of these programs funds education for young children.

As a NAEYC Accredited, Keystone Star 4 program, the highest rated possible, we are reimbursed \$9,490 for a preschooler. Children typically attend 10 hours a day, 260 days a year. That comes to \$3.65 an hour. For Head Start, funding is \$6,800 a year. These programs operate 6 hours a day, 180 days a year. That reimbursement rate comes to \$6.30 an hour. PA PreK Counts provides \$8,000 a year. Children are in PreK programs 5 hours a day, 180 days a year. That reimbursement rate: \$8.89 an hour. As a center director who has the majority of children funded under Child Care Works, the lowest reimbursement, I would love \$8.89 an hour. But really, that amount just is not enough to fund **HIGH QUALITY** care.

Look around the city, can you find a parking lot where you can park a car for \$8.89 an hour? Not likely. Yet highly qualified educators are expected to provide the best possible learning experience to a child for \$8.89 an hour. At this rate we are expected to hire a state certified teacher (who must meet the same standards as teachers in public schools). With 20 children in

a classroom, the second teacher must have a minimum of an Associates degree in ECE. These teachers deserve health benefits. In fact, under the Affordable Care Act, many providers are required to offer health benefits.

To offer PreK Counts programs, providers must earn a Star 3 or 4 rating. This means the center achieved higher standards across the areas in environment, materials and staff qualifications.

What about family engagement? Children who are supported by their families do better in school; Agencies must provide workshops, volunteer opportunities and other supports for families. Who does this at the agency? Not just the teacher, but also an array of staff, whether it is a social worker, family services staff, director or assistant director. Their wages also come out of that \$8.89 an hour.

Nutrition? Healthier foods lead to better health. Children need to be healthy so they can learn. Again, healthy meals/snacks come out of that same \$8.89.

Children at risk? These include those from families who are low income, non-English speaking or those with special needs. At our center, we have translators and interpreters plus a Child Development Psychologist. Again, that \$8.89 is supposed to pay for these critical supports.

The list goes on, I won't spend time addressing how underpaid teachers are. As the work of this commission continues, we **MUST** first look at funding. We cannot do this on the cheap. And in our enthusiasm to provide this opportunity to as many children as possible, **let's not sacrifice quality for quantity.**

Respectfully submitted by
Mary Graham
Executive Director