



Testimony of Day Care Council of New York
Before the New York City Council Committee on Technology
Honorable Jennifer Gutiérrez, Chair
Oversight Hearing: My City Portal | September 30th, 2024

Thank you, Chair Gutiérrez and the Committee on Technology, for holding this hearing on the *MyCity* Portal. Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) is the membership organization of early childhood provider organizations in New York City. DCCNY supports its member organizations and New York City's early childhood field at large through policy research and advocacy, labor relations and mediation, professional development and training for early childhood educators, directors and staff and referral services for parents looking to find child care. DCCNY member organizations provide early care and education at over 200 sites in neighborhoods across all five boroughs. Most DCCNY member organizations work with contracts with New York City's Department of Education. Day Care Council of New York is a steering committee member of Campaign for Children, and our recommendations in this testimony align with that coalition.

The City must continue work to make enrolling in child care simpler for families. DCCNY has been working with our member organizations to identify challenges facing families seeking child care. Providers have indicated several ways to improve the MyPortal system to simplify the enrollment process for families.

For parents seeking child care, the portal contains some user design flaws. In particular, the City directs families to the official *MyCity* portal for assistance, but then reroutes them to other agency websites. For example, when families on public assistance are on the *MyCity* portal, they are referred to the Human Resource Administration; foster care families are referred to their child welfare caseworker; and low-income families seeking vouchers are referred to the child care enrollment application.¹

¹ <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/spotlight-nycs-publicly-supported-child-care-programs/>

Further, applications for 3-K and Pre-K for All are not part of the *MyCity* portal. Instead, families seeking free school-day 3-K or Pre-K must apply through the DOE's *MySchools* application. At the same time, families interested in extended-day 3-K or Pre-K must first apply through *MySchools* and then separately apply through *MyCity* to confirm their eligibility. Creating a more integrated, single platform can help the portal achieve its stated purpose while increasing accessibility for families.

Families interested in Head Start, Early Head Start, and Infant and Toddler programs face a different pathway to care and must enroll directly with the specific program. The Infant and Toddler programs then submit enrollment applications to the DOE for eligibility approval. The existence of multiple portals and multiple steps creates severe hurdles for families.

Providers have also had negative experiences with the DOE's centralized enrollment process, as it prevents them from accepting children on site, resulting in open seats they cannot fill. This lack of flexibility has hindered contracted ECE providers from enrolling families on-site, creating competition between contracted programs and those operated by the DOE in school settings.

DCCNY urges the City to address these issues and ensure that all families have access to quality ECE care that meets their needs. The *MyCity* portal should be consumer-centered and support a seamless application and enrollment process for all birth to five programming in NYC. We therefore recommend the following to improve the *MyCity* Portal:

- **Create** a consumer centered platform – where the applicant need only know the age of child they are seeking care for and provide basic demographics on residence and income levels of household head.
- **Ensure the** portal interfaces with providers so they can assist parents in applying and enrolling in services (full day, full year or school day and school year) and connect them directly to open seats within a center or family child care network
- **Ensure** multilingual access to the platform and that the application is accessible to migrant families. This could include through offering a multilingual technical assistance phone number.
- **Ensure** application and enrollment for all birth to five ECE services can continue year-round
- **Ensure** more data transparency about matching families with care. There should be clear data on which centers families are paired with compared to their first preference
- **Provide support** and clear instructions for enrolling a child with special needs

- **Allow child care providers** space to advertise and describe their center in the *MySchools* platform. This helps families make a more informed decision about child care options in their area.

Improving the MYCity Portal is part of simplifying access to child care. DCCNY also makes the following recommendations to strengthen the enrollment process, which MyCity is part of:

- **Include a walk-ins option** for child care providers to enroll families who express an interest in signing up.
- **Create a more accessible application process** for migrant families by making referrals to Head Start and Proomsie NYC programs for families with undocumented children.
- **As families are enrolling**, let them know if they qualify for Extended Day/ Extended Year programs, which have both income and work requirements. Families become anxious while waiting to find out whether they will need to find after-school care options.
- **Elevate support** of state-level legislation that lowers barriers to access for families seeking child care assistance:
 - The Minimum Earnings Bill - A.1303-A/S.4924-A
 - The Decoupling Bill - A.8878/S.8152
 - The Presumptive Eligibility Bill - A.4099-A/S.4667-A

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.