



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

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City Council Committee on Youth Services Hearing on the FY24 Preliminary Budget 3.22.23

Good morning Chair Stevens and thank you for holding this hearing today. The Office of the Brooklyn Borough President is here today advocating for families across Brooklyn and the greater New York City area. Our priorities for the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) FY24 budget include expanded After-school options, Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) seats, and the overhaul of Summer Rising.

After-School

Hearing from families across Brooklyn, it is clear there is a significant need for expanded after-school opportunities for our youth, especially for kindergarten through 5th grade students. After-school programs are critical for providing enrichment experiences for students, and for providing adequate childcare options for our working families. I recommend that the City funds a Universal After-School program for all elementary schools by increasing the number of COMPASS contracts awarded citywide. Our office also urges that there be parity in the awarded contracts for Cornerstone and Beacon sites which have unique needs that school-based sites do not.

Summer Youth Employment Programs

We applaud the Mayor and this Council for their record-breaking efforts in expanding and enhancing the SYEP program. It's only fitting that as we celebrate the program's 60th anniversary, we celebrate the strides made within the last fiscal year, including serving 90,000 young people; expanding Career Ready slots in partnership with DOE serving 21,000 students across 226 high schools; recruiting 18,000 new worksites; and this Council's very own commitment to taking on 119 youth from all boroughs.

While these are all great accomplishments, we still need more intentional, direct recruitment to reach some of our most disenfranchised young people. This can be achieved by expanding programs such as Career Ready, which factors important targets like economic need and graduation rates; and the SYEP Pride Initiative which identifies safe and affirming work sites for LGBTQ+ youth.

We also applaud DYCD and providers' outreach to NYCHA participants, expanding to 13,300 young people; however we believe the City and DYCD can make greater efforts to increase this number. Another area that requires more intention is the outreach to students with disabilities and District 75 students. There are concerns that many of these youth may be included in the general pool of applicants and therefore assigned to sites that lack adequate training and capacity to provide them with a quality experience. Our office also asks this administration and the Council to revisit existing contracts for providers – as we often see an inequitable experience for participants, where some providers offer more professional development opportunities for SYEP youth than others. While we understand DYCD is expanding its enrichment events across the city, and pivoting to virtual solutions, contracted providers should be able to demonstrate the

necessary capacity to offer their own professional development series for participants and exposure to the field.

Our office supports further investment in SYEP and hopes this administration will continue to baseline it and at minimum match its \$236M investment from last year. It is also important to note that our office was recently made aware that Metro Cards are not guaranteed at this time for participants – I echo the Council’s calls for this funding to be restored to ensure students can get to their worksites without the barriers of transportation costs. Our office also hopes this administration would explore this Council’s proposed year-long mentorship program through SYEP.

Summer Rising

We commend this administration and Council for the expansion of Summer Rising Programming across the city. With 82,000 seats out of 112,000 being filled within the first week of the application going live, it is clear that demand far outweighs availability. With the sunset of COVID_19 federal funding, I urge this Council and Mayor to explore sustainable funding for the projected \$277M program and expand the number of seats to better meet demand for families in need of summer childcare options. I would also encourage a larger commitment particularly to DYCD’s portion of the program to ensure providers can offer competitive rates and increase staffing – as this is an issue many providers are experiencing, impacting program capacity and number of participating providers.

While I will continue to advocate for such an invaluable program, it is not without its flaws. The decision for DOE to be responsible for enrollment resulted in many issues. Families who have received critical programming and childcare from their host CBO’s were suddenly unable to obtain a seat, providers were left at the mercy of principals that they may have never collaborated with, and overall parent confusion on something as simple as documents required to be submitted, arising from poor communication between the DOE and the providers. Constituents shared that in cases of multiples providers housed within the same school, students experienced vastly different programming, exacerbating inequity and impacting students' overall experiences. And lastly, students with IEPs and mandated busing experienced significant disruption throughout their program with early pick-up and a lack of properly trained staff is unacceptable.

I know Chair you’ve have shared many of these concerns and I hope DYCD has made better strides to improve this process both for the families as well as the partners for FY23. This is not something a biweekly meeting with over 139 providers, with multiple site operators, on one call can solve.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to working with the Council throughout the budget process to ensure that DYCD has a robust budget to meet the city’s needs across all its programs.