



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
AND COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY
SEPTEMBER 10, 2020**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chairwomen Inez Barron and Helen Rosenthal for holding this oversight hearing on child care services at the City University of New York in the aftermath of the peak of COVID-19. Child care is a program that is essential to our ability as parents to work and go to school, and important for our children in that it helps them develop the social and emotional skills they will need as they grow older. Yet, it remains one of the most costly expenses for many Americans, let alone many New Yorkers. CUNY has made enormous strides in alleviating this burden for students, who are also parents, by providing flexible, on-campus child care programs that operate during the day, evenings, and weekends. Given the impact of COVID-19 on CUNY students and their trajectory towards graduation, our City has to ensure those who are parents are able to resume their higher education without worrying about child care.

While CUNY has released a guidance for its 17 campuses that provide child care services, it has yet to release a plan to establish how each center will be adequately prepared to adhere to public health standards, such as enforcing social distancing, PPE distribution, ventilation inspections and any necessary repairs, and disinfection and cleaning requirements. What is child care going to look like during this pandemic? The university system needs to consider how the economic slowdown, subsequent budget cuts, and loss of pay will affect the affordability of these child care programs for the parents. The 2021 Adopted Expense Budget allocated \$510,000 towards CUNY child care expansion as part of the City Council's discretionary funding. It is essential for us to know how CUNY will spend those funds to ensure that daycare programs are safe for our students' children and are accessible for the students who depend on them.

I commend CUNY for developing a step-by-step guidance for reopening campus childcare centers. In Stage 1, child care centers reopen at 25 percent capacity, with directors determining the frequency of testing, disinfection and cleaning standards, and designated isolation areas. Stage 2 has centers reopening at 50 percent capacity with all staff being tested weekly or with guidance from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Stage 3 has centers continuing to modify operations and operating at 75 percent capacity, with no traceable illness occurring for children and staff. The final stage of CUNY's guidance has full operation at the centers, with



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parents welcomed to enter and walk throughout the premises. My only concern is whether or not the child care centers on each campus will be monitored by CUNY to examine the extent to which they are adhering to this guidance and the guidelines set forth by DOHMH.

Although our City is slowly returning to normal, we must bear in mind that we are still battling a public health crisis, which means that all precautionary measures must be monitored and enforced. Throughout this school year, CUNY needs to actively ensure that its child care centers are being disinfected and cleaned regularly, testing is being conducted, and each center has a sufficient amount of PPE. A number of CUNY students would not be able to go to college if it were not for the child care centers that the university system provides. Therefore, it is CUNY's responsibility to reopen its child care programs as safely as possible.