Governor and Senate Underestimate the Early Intervention Crisis:
Kids Can’t Wait Response to One-House Budget Proposals

The balance of the Governor’s and Senate budget proposals falls short of what infants and toddlers who are waiting for Early Intervention services need. We are profoundly disappointed that, despite acknowledging there is a problem, the Governor and Senate continue to underestimate the scope of the crisis and to underinvest in some of New York’s most vulnerable children. We applaud the Assembly for rising to the challenge with their proposal of an 11% rate increase for in-person services and an additional 4% rate increase for services delivered in rural and underserved areas. Even that is still shy of what is ultimately needed, but it is a meaningful step that can put New York on the right path.

In 1994, the average base rate for Early Intervention service providers was $79. Thirty years later, it is down to $69. Had the rate kept up with inflation, it would be $156. No matter how you look at it, Early Intervention professionals, most of whom have master’s degrees and professional licensures, simply cannot afford to work in the field any longer. Consequently, there is a growing shortage of providers and longer and longer waitlists for services. Some children are aging out of the program without ever receiving the services they need and are legally entitled to. The Governor and Senate have proposed only a 5% rate increase, bringing the average base rate up by only $3.45.

Early Intervention is a federally mandated program that provides therapeutic support to infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities. Early Intervention can be life changing because of how much a child’s brain develops from birth to age 3. We have heard time and again from parents who were told their children would never walk, talk or care for themselves who are now attending school, playing baseball and helping around the house – all because they received Early Intervention when they needed it.

By federal law, Early Intervention services are provided at no direct cost to families. Instead, the costs are covered by a combination of state and county funds and private health insurers. But the Early Intervention program in New York has been underfunded for decades, leaving children and families in crisis. Today, thousands of children are not receiving services they are legally entitled to, which means they are less likely to reach their full potential socially, emotionally, and educationally. That has lifelong consequences for the children and their families. It also poses a much larger cost burden on government when more expensive in-school and adult services are needed as a result of missing the Early Intervention window of development.

Within the past year, reports from the New York State Comptroller and the US Department of Education have confirmed that New York is failing to meet its obligations to infants and toddlers. We call on the Governor, Senate and Assembly to come together and make a real impact on this crisis by:

- Increasing Early Intervention reimbursement rates by 11% for all in-person services
- Maintaining the proposed 4% additional rate modification for rural and underserved areas
- Paying for a study to determine the true cost of these services and a fiscally sustainable way to cover those costs
- Instituting a loan forgiveness program to recruit and retain more providers

The legal, fiscal and moral imperative is clear: kids can’t wait any longer for bold action and 5% simply is not enough to make a difference.