

CHILD CARE

Support efforts to expand the supply of affordable, quality childcare for all who need it. (LWVUS Impact on Issues, 2006-2008, p. 75)

During the period 1989-1994, a simultaneous tax reduction and budget shortfall adversely affected a range of needed services. The LWNYS therefore was cautious about lobbying for childcare services in preference to other needed state programs. In 1991, the state League board decided on a moratorium on lobbying program dollars for all fiscal legislative issues. (Each year until the moratorium, the League had supported expanding the funding and framework of childcare centers.) However, with the introduction of the 1995-1996 Executive budget, Governor Pataki included a four-year tax cut of 25%. These circumstances led the state Board to lift the moratorium on League legislative lobbying concerning social service funding. The League has continued support for legislation that would give tax benefits to corporations that provide day care services to their employees, and increase appropriations for good developmental day care for children of low-income working parents.

In 1988 and 1989, the League worked to provide salary enhancements to child care workers and to increase funding for childcare resource and referral agencies across New York State. Governor Pataki's 1995-96 Executive budget proposal deleted all funding for childcare resource and referral agencies. However, the legislature restored \$500,000 for this valuable service. In 1996-97, League continued its effort to expand the supply of affordable quality childcare for all who need it. In 1996-97, the push for employment-based welfare reform provided an opportunity for childcare advocates to expand and improve childcare for all NYS parents. The League joined 30 other organizations in support of the NYS Child Care Coordinating Council's "CHILD CARE WORKS . . ." campaign. The campaign's five-point plan in brief was to: keep child care affordable; maintain health safety standards; support quality child care; expand the supply of child care; and increase funding for child care resources and referral services that will help parents make informed decisions regarding child care. League lobbied with other campaign members in support of these five points.

The League continued its involvement in the Child Care that Works Campaign (CCtW) and in 1998-99 the League joined with other Child-welfare advocates as part of the campaign in supporting a major legislative proposal to address the critical shortage of affordable, high quality child care/early learning programs in New York State. The total proposed cost of the CCtW proposal in State Fiscal Year 1999-2000 was to be \$277 million. As a way to meet the needs of both parents and children under the CCtW proposal, investments are made in three main component areas: 1) expanded eligibility for subsidized child care, 2) a series of quality initiatives to ensure that New York's child care/early learning programs are the best possible for children, and 3) facility renovation & construction to expand supply. Currently, childcare is more expensive than public university tuition in every area of the state. The members also support proposals to improve quality by investing in teacher pay and education. The League participated in conference calls and lobbying visits.

Since 1999, childcare advocacy efforts have been joined with budget advocacy for universal Pre-Kindergarten and early grade class size reduction programs. In 1996, expanded preschool education was the subject of a report by Lieutenant Governor Ross. The League supported the intent of the report. Assembly Speaker Silver has continued to advocate for funding for this program. Although the

1997-98 final budget included a \$5.5 billion education plan, which would phase in over five years pre-kindergarten classes for all 4-year-olds, full-day kindergarten for all children, and smaller class sizes in the early grades, this program has never been fully implemented.

The League participates in the Pre-K Coalition (formerly called the Emergency Coalition to Save Universal Pre-K), a statewide consortium. The Pre-K Coalition continues an active annual lobbying program in Albany and throughout the State. Their advocacy materials and list of members, including the LWVNYS, are available at <http://www.winningbeginningny.org/>. The basic premises are that in Pre-K, children develop the cognitive, sensory-motor and social skills they need to succeed in school. The League believes that investing in children's early years lays the foundation for reading, writing, and math skills, critical to academic success and economic self-sufficiency.

Each year since the early education legislation passed in 1997, Governor Pataki has proposed less than full funding of the amount scheduled during the phase-in period. During the budget negotiations in 2003, following intense lobbying by the Pre-K Coalition, the legislature overrode vetoes by Governor Pataki and supported funding for Pre-K programs, although not at the required level to provide universal Pre-K throughout the State.

The League has participated in attempts to restore the funding cuts, and has met with varying degrees of success. The cost of providing quality programs has increased, making it more difficult to spread the program to all eligible children and to provide quality professionals, transportation, and space.

By 2005, the Governor and legislature had still not implemented the multi-year phase-in. Approximately ¼ of NYS 4-year-olds attend pre-kindergarten classes. Full-day kindergarten is still not universally provided. The League continues to support the full phase-in of these programs statewide. The history of recent LWVNYS advocacy in this area appears under State Finances in this publication.

With the support of the newly elected governor, Eliot Spitzer the 2007-2008 state budget included full funding for universal pre-school education for all four year olds.