Chair

WAYS & MEANS CHAIR MS. CODY: Good evening. I'd like to call to order the Ways and Means Committee public hearing on the proposed 2020 budget. We have an exit in the back, two exits in the front. I would ask that everyone please silence their cellphones if you haven't already.

Mr. Chairman Knapp, do you have any preliminary comments that you would like to make?

LEGIS CHAIR KNAPP: Thank you.

Appreciate everyone's attendance tonight. You know it's a long process, very intense process, we've got a $1.3 billion budget to go over. Everyone was working very very hard on it. So I want to recognize our clerk, Debbie Maturo and her entire staff for all their hard work during the past three weeks or so. And of course all the legislators too, who kind of put their lives on hold for a time to get this done. So appreciate everybody.

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Obviously you know tonight is about the budget and you know comments about that are obviously welcome, and recommendations. We're here to listen. Like I said, it's not a time for politics, that will be very shortly. So anyway, with that, thank you, Madam Chairperson.

WAYS & MEANS CHAIR CODY: Thank you.

Any other legislator wish to comment?

LEGISLATOR ERVIN: On behalf of the whole staff, I would like to thank Debbie and Darcee too, they worked really hard with all going on. So I thank you anyway.

WAYS & MEANS CHAIR CODY: Absolutely, Darcee has done a great job, the whole staff here, and had great participation in the budget by all Legislators.

LEGIS CHAIR KNAPP: Darcee, we're all thanking you.

CHAIR CODY: We had great participation and cooperation, also spent most of the time together, which
Knoblock
was nice. So moving on. I will point out that if you do have any comments that you wish to make, if you wish to speak, please sign in at the front of the chambers. If you have a printed hard copy of your comments, please provide them to our clerk, Deb Maturo.

The commentary will begin. First up is Peter Knoblock. And on deck will be Laurie Black.

**PETER KNOBLOCK:** Good evening. My name is Peter Knoblock. I've been a resident of Syracuse for close to 60 years. How that happened, that's a topic for another time.

I'm here to thank you for your support for our children in our city and county. The county already supports clinics in public schools and Syracuse public schools. We have an opportunity to really try to put the pieces together. So I'm really here to support the budget item for Early Childhood strategies. We have the Early Childhood

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Alliance, we have Imagination Library, we have a number of groups that are trying to address our little short persons. And it's really a no brainer when it comes to thinking about prevention. So thank you for your support and help, and I hope you approve it. Thank you.

**CHAIR CODY:** Thank you. And on deck is Ms. Ross.

**LAURIE BLACK:** Good evening. I apologize for my voice. I do have a cold or I'm getting off one. Thank you for having this public testimony tonight. I'm here representing the Early Childhood Alliance and the Early Childhood Alliance Business Council. I'm the Director of the Early Childhood Alliance of Onondaga.

For those of you not familiar, this is a coalition of partners, and Onondaga County is a significant partner in this work. And our overall goal is that all children actually from kindergarten on

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are ready to learn in Onondaga County. And unfortunately as I'm sure you do know, many kids are not ready for school ready to learn. And by 3rd grade they are not reading at grade level. So across Onondaga County, only 40 percent are reading at grade level. And that's 40 percent, in the city it's 22 percent. State-wide it's 52 percent. So for Onondaga County to be that far below the state-wide average is very disappointing. But that just doesn't happen in 3rd grade, it happens much earlier than at 3rd grade, it happens starting at birth.

For our community to really address this issue we're going to have to address it significantly in early childhood. And we're so grateful that the County Executive has seen this early childhood investment as part of the strategy to address poverty. But it's bigger than poverty to address educational performance in Onondaga.

Black
County community.

So across the country we truly understand that the five year life is the foundation for all that comes later. The research is in, there is no more debate. Innovative communities across the country, we can't wait for the federal government and the states.

Federal spending is about 3 percent of their education on early childhood. The state is under-investing as well.

The only way to truly transform this community is taking local dollars and investing in their children. We have a Business Council that is behind us and they do see the connection between the first years of life and the workforce.

So we're thankful for the Business Council for their advocacy for this work.

Overall the big picture is that the County Executive is investing in a vision of $1.5 million which will be transformative for our community. We
Ross
will see results because of this
investment. And we're urging the
Legislature to stand behind the County
Executive in this investment. And
really help us to make sure all children
in Onondaga County can be successful in
their school system. So thank you for
allowing me to testify, and I hope you
will support these investments. Thank
you, very much.

CHAIR CODY: Thank you, very much. I
did forget to say, your comments are for
three minutes. We're doing well on that.
Misse Ross up next, and on deck is Lori
Schakow.

MISSE ROSS: Good evening. I want
to thank the County for its commitment
to ending childhood lead exposure. I'm
overjoyed that we have the most money
available for remediation that we have
ever had. I do want to warn you that
remediation funds alone will not solve
the problem.

We need to make sure that every
child is being tested. We also need to
ensure that we have enough staff to test
the properties where these children
reside, in a timely fashion.

Currently there are only three lead
inspectors in Onondaga County. 600 to
700 children in our community are
exposed to lead each year. Three lead
inspectors is just not enough to handle
the volume of inspections. The shortage
of lead inspectors creates a situation
where children are left in continued
exposure for far too long. It takes
time for the initial inspection, then
more time for the landlord to remediate,
then another inspection must be done.

Many times the property fails again,
which results in more time for
remediation and retesting, until it
passes. All the while these children
are living surrounded by poison.

We cannot have children residing in
the home for six months, eight months, a
year, waiting for testing and

Ross
remediation to happen. The longer the
child is exposed to lead the more
harmful the effects are. We need to
make sure these cases are resolved
quickly. And if that is not possible,
we need to relocate these families.

The WIC program has provided testing
in our community for decades. That has
stopped as of July 1st, 2019. This
testing was crucial in catching the
poison of children who have fallen
through the cracks in our healthcare
system otherwise.

I beg that you find a way to restart
the lead testing and WIC immediately. I
am unable to ascertain whether this
decision came from the state or the
county level. I am begging you to
partner with our state government on
this issue, as you have with our city
and federal government.

I'm fearful that without the WIC
testing the remediation funding will not
make it to our most severely impacted
neighborhoods.

I also beg you to find a way to
increase the number of lead inspectors
in our community. Three people cannot
handle the amount of testing a problem
this large requires. Onondaga County
manages the majority of the different
agencies that are involved when a child
is exposed to lead. Many of those
agencies are funded by state and federal
government. We need these agencies to
reach to our state and federal
representatives if programs are not
working or if changes are made to them
that will negatively impact our
community.

We need everyone working together on
this. This problem has plagued our
community for decades. It has deeply
contributed to the violence in our
streets, the crowding in our jails, the
low graduation rates and poverty in our
community. Whether you think this
impact you or not, it does. The impact
Schakow
ripples out.
Let's make the most of this opportunity with this remediation money and attack this problem from all angles. Let us please not be talking about this issue in another four years. Thank you.

CHAIR CODY: Thank you. Lori Schakow.

LORI SCHAKOW: Good evening. I'm Lori Schakow, the Executive Director for Childhood Solutions and a partner with Laurie Black on the Early Childhood Alliance.

I want to thank the Ways and Means Committee in taking a bold step to transform early childhood education in Onondaga County. You should have all received, and hopefully read the copy of the report we partnered on. It's filled with a lot of detail that Laurie mentioned. I hope you all read it. It explains not only the strategies but why early childhood is so important, both for children's development and the community's economic development.

Schakow
But what you won't find in the report is that voters in New York State raise childhood education and childcare as a top tier priority. And I'm going to read from, this is very brief, from the report.

"So global strategy groups in partnership with raising New York, conducted an online survey between July 8th to 14th, 2019, among 1,208 likely 2020 voters in New York State. The survey found that voters across New York State are overwhelmingly supportive of in investing more public funds to ensure that infants in poverty are helped in the development of tracking at birth and throughout early childhood.

When asked for ranking a list of issues, including education and childcare, access to affordable healthcare, eradicating poverty and homelessness, reducing taxes, eliminating wasteful government spending, and protecting the environment..."