

**City of Philadelphia**  
**Committee for Law and Government**  
**Public Hearing February 18, 2015**  
**Testimony on Bill No. 15005 and Res. No. 15017**  
**Public Citizens for Children and Youth**  
**PCCY Board Chair Leslie Winder**

Good afternoon Councilman Greenlee and members of the Committee for Law and Government. Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts on Bill No. 15005 and Resolution No. 15017 calling for the voters to decide if Philadelphia should establish and define the powers and responsibilities of a Commission on Universal Pre-Kindergarten. My name is Leslie Winder and I am here testifying on behalf of Public Citizens for Children and Youth, where I serve as Board Chair. I am also Director of Strategic Partnerships at Solutions for Progress, a Philadelphia-based mission-driven company producing practical solutions to the complex problems of poverty. More importantly, I am a mom...a working mom...and while many years removed from the world of pre-K I remember quite well the challenges in finding affordable, accessible, high quality Pre-K options for my then young daughter.

The research in support of quality early education has continually mounted over the past fifty years. Other nations around the world have invested wisely in their youngest learners with impressive results. To his credit, President Obama has been persistent in his support of high-quality early learning programs. In addition, the broad, diverse, statewide, coalition called Pre-K for PA is working to ensure greater investments in all of Pennsylvania's children. High quality pre-K helps children prepare for school, helps our schools achieve more and it boosts our economy in the short-term and the long-term. Hopefully, initiatives at the federal and state levels will be successful and deliver more opportunity to the children of every city in our state and nation. However, Philadelphia is very wise to begin exploring our own capacity to deliver opportunity for our children. Currently in our city, there are about 14,000 children unable to access quality pre-school. As a result, too many children arrive to school unprepared for kindergarten. Some children arrive, through no fault of their own, two, three and even four years developmentally behind their peers who are prepared for kindergarten. The children who arrive

behind struggle to catch up and some find themselves in special needs classrooms for a few years. Some never catch up and are much more likely to drop out.

Successful, quality pre-K programs have been launched, funded and successfully implemented at the municipal level. We may all be most familiar with New York City. Mayor Bill de Blasio is certainly an inspiration. However, we are not New York. We do not have as much local, taxable wealth as New York City. Therefore, it may be more useful to take a look at Union City, NJ.

Union City has managed to reverse a grim education trajectory with targeted, strategic investments including high quality pre-K. Along with increased NJ state investments, Union City found local dollars to fund pre-K programs. Union City is one of America's poorest cities with an unemployment rate nearly 50 percent higher than the national average. The population is mostly Latino. The drop-out rate was horrific. [But now the situation is completely reversed. In 2011, 90 percent of the students graduated and nearly 75 percent enrolled in college.](#)

*(Improbable Scholars by David L. Kirp).*

Citywide pre-school is playing a huge part in Union City's K-12 turnaround success. Pre-school has powerful life-long impacts. Key skills are being taught during pivotal moments in children's brain development. Decision-making, impulse control and conflict resolution as well as pre-literacy and pre-math skills are all present in any quality pre-school curriculum. Outside evaluators give Union City's pre-K program high marks. However, Union City school district Early Education director Adriana Birne says it best:

*"I think of preschool as the Magic Kingdom; whatever is happening in the rest of these children's lives, this is a wonderful place to be." – [The Nation](#) April 8, 2013*

So, we know quality pre-K programs are great for children, especially at-risk children who may be suffering adverse affects of poverty in other parts of their lives. Quality pre-K is also great for the K-12 schools because can deliver more children prepared to learn in kindergarten. But, there are other winners. Parents of young children also benefit. They know their child is in a safe, nurturing, educational environment. This piece of mind enables parents to go to work and fosters greater productivity while at work. All other taxpayers also win as the positive effects of

quality pre-K ripple up through the years. We would document increased literacy rates, reduced drop-out and incarceration rates and finally, a boosted quality of our future workforce.

In conclusion, I urge this Committee to pass Bill No. 15005 so we as a city can begin a serious, substantive and continual dialogue among leaders and experts about how to fund and implement quality pre-K. There are numerous municipal models to study and other cities are succeeding. It is time for Philadelphia to find a way for the any young children eager to be ready for kindergarten.