

Melissa Suarez  
PHLpreK budget testimony  
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Hello. My name is Melissa Suarez. I am a mother of three children in Philadelphia County. All 3 children have had experiences in early education and Philadelphia pre K.

My twins were the first of my children to have the opportunity to attend the Philadelphia pre K program when it was free. We were the first year.

It was an amazing experience. We had barely gotten in the door. There were only a few seats left, and when I had twins, I believe strongly that the director Debbie Deacon made the impossible possible by creating another seat for our other son so that they could attend together and so we didn't have to choose who gets to go to school.

I'm here to ask you guys to think about that: to increase the number of seats that we have in early pre K from 5,200 to 6,000.

My younger son didn't have that same opportunity. There weren't enough seats for him and he has significant needs.

What I know is that my twins were able to be linked up and evaluated for special education services and that set them off on a great pace for the rest of their learning experiences. It helped us make sure that we identify their needs early.

The quality of a child's early learning experiences are critical for making a foundation that is either strong or weak that changes their life and their trajectory of their life forever.

When children miss out on this once in a lifetime opportunity, they pay that price. They pay it by dying before they have the chance to grow up or they grow up poor with physical and mental health issues. We all pay the price when we don't provide the supports for our children and when we don't put money towards benefiting their future, what we end up doing and what we're saying is something Maya Angelou said "if it is true that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link..." what, then, does it say when we don't provide for the greatest of our children's needs, for those who really, really depend on these critical hours, these critical moments, these critical years.

If there are no seats available, what will they do? What will happen to them? Thank you.