

Dina Kassymbekova
PHLpreK City Council public hearing testimony
5/3/2023

Good morning to all members of City council,

My name is Dina Kassymbekova. Thank you for opportunity to share my voice.

I am a mother of 3 children, ages 9, 8, and 3 years old. I am here today to ask City Council to increase the number of PHLpreK slots to 6,000, so my child can continue to benefit from high-quality early childhood education.

My youngest child currently goes to A Secure Future Academy in the University City, which is in West Philadelphia.

As a recent graduate of a School of Education, I know how important high-quality early childhood education is to a developing mind and I am thrilled that my child can get that early learning experience. My son lives in a trilingual environment and prior to attending his current daycare, I was worried he might have some type of delay because he was lost among three languages. But once he started learning at the Academy, I saw his speech ability blossom and now he's a fluent English speaker. As an immigrant whose first language is not English, this has been a huge relief for me.

However, I am also saddened by the fact that I will most likely need to pull him from the program because it has become unaffordable despite him being enrolled only part-time. Despite my husband being the only breadwinner right now, our family makes too much to be eligible for other income-limited early childhood programs, like Pre-K Counts and Head Start and we cannot continue to pay out of pocket for part-time care.

As a recent graduate, I am so excited to find a job and start my career as an educator. However, without care for my son, I will not be able to go to interviews and look for a job. I long to be able to contribute to my family and our economy by joining the workforce and work full-time job, but without reliable, safe, and high-quality care for my son, this dream will not become a reality.

When I heard about Philadelphia's free preschool program PHLpreK, I was confused why our daycare did not offer the program. When I asked the director, she said she applied to be part of the program but did not receive slots. I know that if she were to become a PHLpreK provider, I would be able to keep my son in her program so I can work and my child continues to receive the high-quality care and education he deserves.

I am asking City Council today to please expand the PHLpreK program slots to 6,000 so that children like my son can benefit from high-quality early childhood education and so that I can get a job and go to work.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate it

Best,
Dina