

## **For New York City Family Day Care Providers** **Questions and Answers about the Union**

**August 2006**

### **What is a union?**

A union is a democratic organization of working people who unite to get rights, wages and benefits that are difficult to win as individuals. It is formed when workers join together. A union is a legal entity.

### **Why do people join a union?**

When workers unite as a union, they have the power to demand better wages and benefits, better working conditions, fair treatment and respect. A union gives workers the means to get the employer to agree to give them these rights in a legally binding agreement – a union contract.

### **We are considered private contractors in business for ourselves; if we form a union, will our status change?**

Our goal is that your status as private contractors will stay the same. But we want New York State to recognize the right of family child care providers to bargain as a group with the state and/or the city around subsidy and benefits issues, just as the states of Illinois, Washington, Iowa and Oregon agreed to do with providers in those states. We would seek to make the state and its appropriate government agency the “employer” for the limited purpose of bargaining over these matters.

### **How will we win the right to form a union?**

These are some of the steps that we must take:

1. We must demonstrate to the state’s elected officials that family child care providers have problems and there is strong support for forming a union.
2. We will lobby the State Legislature to pass a law stating that family child care providers have the right to form a union. We will also lobby the governor to issue an executive order calling for the same thing.

Once this law is passed, a government entity will be designated with which we would be able to negotiate to improve the wages and working conditions of family child care providers.

### **What happens after we win the right to organize and bargain collectively with the state/city?**

Once legislation is passed to recognize our right to bargain as a group, we would use the procedure set by the state government to prove that a majority of the family day care providers want to be represented by a union. Usually, this is done in one of two ways: a card check that shows by the number of authorization cards signed by providers that a majority want union representation; or through an election that demonstrates that a majority of the providers want union representation. Every provider (licensed and informal) who receives a state subsidy would vote. A mechanism would be established to allow family child care providers to demonstrate that they want the UFT (the United Federation of Teachers) to be the union that represents them. If a majority vote to be members of the UFT, then all state-subsidized providers in New York City would become members of the UFT.

### **How long will it take to win union representation?**

We will fight for this until we win! It could take awhile. The stronger and more united we are, the faster we can make this happen! Also, while we're fighting for union representation, we can still act like a union. We will take many of the problems that face us and demand that those in charge address them.

### **The network that I work with has told me not to join a union. What do I do if the network stops referring kids to me?**

That is intimidation. The network should not harass or intimidate you because of your interest and support in the union. Nor should the network withhold work from you based on your union activity. If the network stops referring kids to you or discriminates against you in any way because of your union activity, immediately contact the union. The union will file a complaint with the city and will fight such abuses through every legal means available.

### **What happens after we win the right to bargain collectively?**

The UFT will ask all family child care providers who have joined in this effort to give suggestions for what you'd like to see in the contract. Then the contract committee would begin to draw up demands for higher subsidy rates, benefits, and other things that providers would like to have. The contract committee is made up of providers and union officials with negotiating experience. This committee will negotiate with city and/or state officials on behalf of state-subsidized providers. This will not be easy, and we will engage parents and the community in our fight for a fair contract. Once the terms of a contract are agreed to, the providers covered by the proposed contract must vote on it before it can go into effect. This process is called a ratification vote.

### **When do members pay union dues and how much will they be?**

No dues will be collected until a contract is agreed on by the membership and signed by city and/or state officials. The UFT Executive Board will set dues at the lowest possible rate.

### **What is the United Federation of Teachers?**

The UFT is one of the largest unions in New York City with more than 160,000 members, including 32,000 retirees. The union represents about 78,000 classroom teachers, 16,000 school paraprofessionals, as well as school secretaries, guidance counselors, psychologists, therapists, social workers, nurses and some other school personal. The UFT also represents 2,500 nurses in the Visiting Nurse Service, United Cerebral Palsy workers, and some staff at private hospitals and health care institutions.

### **Why is the UFT interested in family day care providers?**

As providers you play an important role in teaching children. All the research indicates that quality early childhood education is a critical factor in a child's success in school. The UFT wants to make sure that people who do the important job of working with and educating children get the wages, support and professional respect that they deserve.

### **How will family providers fit into the UFT union structure?**

The UFT Executive Board voted on June 20, 2005 to set up a functional chapter for family day care providers within the UFT. All providers will be members of that chapter. Functional chapters are set up within the union to address the unique concerns and needs of its members. They are fairly autonomous but have the full support of the parent organization. Within the functional chapter for family child care providers, the members in each borough will hold regular meetings for providers and will elect neighborhood and borough family day care provider representatives. The chapter will elect officers who will meet monthly to discuss issues and concerns.

### **If the UFT goes on strike against the Department of Education, does that mean that we go on strike, too?**

No. Only school employees who are covered under the contract between the UFT and the Department of Education would be on strike.

### **Will the union help me if I have a problem?**

The union has demanded that the city and state establish a grievance procedure for providers. A group of providers and UFT officials met with city and state officials to put forward a proposal. We are also setting up an internal grievance committee of skilled advocates from our union membership to assist providers with problems and help providers navigate the complex state and city regulations that affect their work. The union also should be able to get the city and state to provide better services for family providers through contracts and other agreements that we fight for and win.

### **What benefits do I get by being a member of a union?**

You will have the benefit of being part of a large organization of family child care providers who share your concerns. Together, you have the power to solve problems. Specific benefits include:

1. Contractual Benefits – Once you have negotiated a contract, you will receive whatever health, retirement and job security benefits we win in that agreement.
2. Professional Development – In the near future, you will also be eligible for UFT professional development classes. You will also be invited to participate in UFT-sponsored programs such as Dial-a-Teacher, a helpline to assist children with their homework.
3. Consumer Benefits – The UFT has a number of consumer benefits that you can take advantage of. These include discounted tickets for amusement parks, movies, video rentals and vacation packages and discounts on rental cars. You can also take advantage of discounted liability insurance and homeowners/renters insurance and discounted dental, vision and prescription programs, among many other things.

**Will assistants be part of the union?**

The first step is for family child care providers who receive funds from the government to take care of our city's children to come together as a union, win the legal right to organize and negotiate a good contract. In this process, family child care providers will talk about how to ensure that assistants are also treated fairly and with respect. The union will be guided by the will of the family child care providers on this subject.