

2024 Accomplishments

on Behalf of Expecting Families, Infants & Toddlers



POLICY PRIORITY: HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

Accessible Family- and Center-based Care & Learning



Budget

- Appropriation of **\$122M in FY 2025 for the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to administer the Smart Start Workforce Compensation Grants, Smart Start Quality Support Program and the Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program**
- Appropriation of an **11.1% increase (\$75M) in FY 2025 for the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to expand the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG)**, with at least 25% of new funding set aside for Prevention Initiative prenatal-to-age-three programs, including center-based early care and learning
- Appropriation of a **6.3% increase (\$36.5M) in FY 2025 for IDHS to accommodate the growing subsidy caseloads of the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)**



Legislation

- Passage of SB 2675 (Pub. Act 103-759), **expanding eligibility for the Early Childhood Construction Grants** to not-for-profit entities that rent or lease from another not-for-profit entity
- Passage of HB 4491 (Pub. Act 103-821), **improving operational flexibility for early care and learning programs** by allowing certain experienced teachers to open or close a facility on a given day, instead of the director



Administration and Implementation

- Grants totaling **\$9.4M (114% increase) for ISBE Prevention Initiative Center-Based programs**, serving an estimated **720 additional infants and toddlers**
- Inclusion of an **increased award amount for infant-toddler classrooms** in both the **Smart Start Transition Grants** for FY 2024 and the **Smart Start Workforce Grants** for FY 2025
- Submission of recommendations for **the Illinois Child Care and Development Fund Plan Federal Fiscal Years 2025-2027** to include strategies for stabilizing and improving the supply and quality of early care and learning for infants and toddlers



Public Awareness, Engagement and Mobilization

- Engagement of over **250 home- and center-based early care and learning providers in a series of listening sessions and focus groups** about both the IDHS Smart Start Workforce Compensation Grants and the ISBE ECBG
- Mobilization of more than **10 parents and providers to testify at a public hearing** in favor of increased ECBG funding in the FY 2025 budget, with comments focused specifically on Prevention Initiative prenatal-to-age-three programs

POLICY PRIORITY: HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

Optimized Early Intervention Services



Budget

- Appropriation of an **3.8% increase (\$6M) in FY 2025 for the Illinois Department of Human Services' Early Intervention (EI) program** to accommodate growing caseloads for EI service delivery



Administration and Implementation

- Federal grants to 7 community health centers in Illinois totaling **\$1.4M through the Early Childhood Development Award**, for the purpose of **increasing developmental screenings and referrals** for appropriate services, including EI
- Disbursement of **one-time incentive payments** to EI service coordinators and providers, funded with expiring pandemic relief dollars, to encourage **workforce retention**
- Proposed **expansion of the income threshold for families to receive EI services at no cost**, from 185% to 318% of the Federal Poverty Level, and consideration of recommendations to continue waiving all family fees or only issue fees when families receive all entitled services
- Ongoing implementation of **strategies to address existing disparities in EI access for underserved populations and make other system improvements**, including multi-state research, cost modeling, modified service delivery pilots and the NICU-to-Home service delivery model



Public Awareness, Engagement and Mobilization

- Collection of over **650 letters** to lawmakers from parents, providers and other advocates **in support of increased EI funding**
- Engagement of families and providers through a series of town halls and "know your rights" workshops to **improve public awareness of families' procedural rights, including the right to file a state complaint** if there has been a violation of EI timelines
- Publication of **15 media stories across the state highlighting the impact of EI service delays** on children and families

