

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: 2024 Accomplishments & 2025 Priorities

on Behalf of Expecting Families, Infants & Toddlers

This document provides a summary of Raising Illinois' top accomplishments from Fiscal Year 2024 and its key priorities for Fiscal Year 2025, across four policy-specific goals and eight interconnected strategies within the [Illinois Prenatal-to-Age 3 Agenda](#). Together with partners and state leaders, the coalition advances policy change through federal, state and local budget advocacy, legislative advocacy, administrative and implementation advocacy and public awareness and engagement.

We encourage you to join us in advancing new and refreshed priorities, amplifying efforts and sharing information about our collective work. Visit [www.raisingillinois.org/get-involved](http://www.raisingillinois.org/get-involved) to join the Raising Illinois coalition and be a part of our robust and diverse advocacy efforts.

### ✓ 2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### □ 2025 PRIORITIES

## HEALTHY PARENTS & BABIES

### Comprehensive Perinatal Supports

- ✓ Appropriations in FY 2025 to **IHFS (\$155M) and IDPH (\$4M)** to improve inpatient outcomes at **safety-net hospitals** and develop a **community-based reproductive health action plan**
- ✓ Passage of HB 5142 (Pub. Act 103-720), **requiring commercial health insurance to cover services** for pregnancy, postpartum and newborn care **provided by doulas, midwives and lactation consultants**, as well as related medical supplies, starting in 2026
- ✓ Expansion of **Family Connects, a Universal Newborn Support Services (UNSS) model**, in the City of Chicago, Peoria County and Stephenson County, reaching over **10,000 families** combined
- ✓ Engagement of over **400 parents, providers and other advocates across two public all-Coalition events** highlighting the maternal care experiences of birthing people and their providers

- Secure **targeted state funding in FY 2026** for the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IHFS) to continue improving **equitable access to comprehensive maternal health services**, including prenatal and postpartum mental health care
- Extend **coverage for reproductive health and related services** under the IHFS Family Planning Program to otherwise eligible Illinoisans **regardless of immigration status**
- Fully implement **Medicaid coverage for services provided by doulas, nurse midwives, lactation specialists and home visitors** as directed under the Improving Health Care for Pregnant and Postpartum Individuals Act (SB 967; Pub. Act 102-665)
- Engage expecting parents, new families and health professionals to **better understand the new Medicaid provider types and benefits** to support maternal and infant health

### Strengthened Home Visiting System

- ✓ **Appropriation increases in FY 2025 for ISBE (\$75M) and IDHS (\$5)** to expand state-funded evidence-based home visiting programs
- ✓ Administration of **HFI, MCHV, MIECHV and PI home visiting program expansion**, serving nearly **19,000 parents and children** combined across funding models
- ✓ Publication of findings from the **Illinois Home Visiting Caregiver and Provider Feedback Project**, led by Start Early, with recommendations for strengthening supports for caregivers and providers

- **Increase state funding in FY 2026 for ISBE (\$75M) and IDHS (\$5)** to continue expanding evidence-based home visiting programs
- As part of the transition to the **new Illinois Department of Early Childhood, include a statewide data system, saturation goals, new workforce pipeline opportunities** and other stakeholder recommendations for home visiting services
- Continue increasing **public understanding of home visiting and its benefits** through messaging materials, with particular focus on fatherhood engagement and home visitor descriptions

## HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

### Accessible Family- & Center-based Early Learning & Care

- ✓ **Increase state funding in FY 2025 for IDHS (\$158.5M) and ISBE (\$75M)** to implement and expand **early care and learning initiatives under Smart Start**
- ✓ 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
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Engagement of over **260 home- and center-based early care and learning providers and parents through listening sessions, focus groups and public hearings** on prenatal-to-age-three programs \$2M for Off-Hours Child Care Program Fund

- **Increase state funding in FY26 for IDHS (\$170M) and ISBE (\$75M)** to continue implementing and expanding **early care and learning initiatives under Smart Start**
- **Improve child care licensing functions and collect data on early childhood workforce benefits use**
- Ensure the **Smart Start Workforce Grants, Smart Start Quality Support Program and other resources are responsive to provider concerns from both home- and center-based programs** and prioritize expanding the supply and quality of infant-toddler care and learning
- Educate state lawmakers and the public on the **need for more qualified infant-toddler educators in communities statewide** to increase the supply and quality of infant-toddler care and learning

### Optimized Early Intervention

- ✓ 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
- ✓ Disbursement of **one-time incentive payments** to EI service coordinators and providers, funded with expiring pandemic relief dollars, to encourage **workforce retention**
- ✓ Publication of **15 media stories across the state highlighting the impact of EI service delays** on children and families

- **Increase state funding by \$60M in FY 2026 for the Illinois Department of Human Services' Early Intervention (EI) program** to substantially raise rates for providers and more effectively serve families
- Increase the **number of children and families accessing EI services**, with a focus on children under age one and children who meet automatic eligibility criteria
- Mobilize families, providers and other stakeholders to advocate for **increased state investment in EI** and improve **public awareness of families' procedural rights** regarding EI services

## FINANCIALLY SECURE FAMILIES

### Family-friendly Work Policies

- ✓ Passage of HB 2161 (Pub. Act 103-797), prohibiting employers from refusing to hire, refusing to promote, firing, disciplining, harassing or retaliating against an employee based on **actual or perceived family responsibilities**
- ✓ Implementation of the **Paid Leave for All Workers Act** (SB 208; Pub. Act 102-1143), effective January 1, 2024, with final rules published on April 30, 2024, entitling most workers in Illinois, outside of Cook County and the City of Chicago, to earn a minimum of up to 40 hours of paid time off per year

### Income Supports for Families

- ✓ Appropriations in FY 2025 for new income supports for families, including **\$50M for the Child Tax Credit, \$10M for the Medical Debt Relief Pilot Program and \$1M for the Diaper Distribution Pilot Program**
- ✓ Passage of HB 4951 (Pub. Act 103-592), the FY 2025 state revenue package, including the **creation of a new state-level child tax credit** for eligible families with at least one child under age 12 to receive a 20% increase to the value of their Earned Income Tax Credit in tax year 2024, and a 40% increase in subsequent tax years
- ✓ Creation of a multi-year collaboration between IDHS and the Illinois Head Start Association to increase WIC coverage by **coordinating referrals to WIC for families enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start programs**

- Establish a **statewide paid family and medical leave insurance program**, with substantial protections for low-wage workers and sufficient time off for new parents and infants to bond
- Inform working parents of the **paid time off protections available** across the City of Chicago, Cook County and the rest of the state

- Increase state funding by \$50M in FY 2026 for the Illinois Department of Revenue to double the value of the state-level Child Tax Credit** for eligible families beginning in tax year 2025
- Establish a **state-level guaranteed income or similar unconditional cash assistance program**, or a task force to inform the development of such a model for ensuring families with young children can meet their material needs
- Increase **WIC outreach and referrals for families enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start programs**, through the multi-year collaboration between IDHS and the Illinois Head Start Association
- Increase the **WIC coverage rate**, particularly for children ages 1-3, through **outreach and mobile enrollment campaigns** both statewide and in the City of Chicago

## STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE

### Cross-system Preparation, Professional Development & Support

- ✓ Appropriations in FY 2025 to ISAC of **\$5.25M for the Human Services Professional Loan Repayment Program and \$5M for the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity**
- ✓ Passage of the FY 2025 Budget Implementation Act (HB 4959; Pub. Act 103-588), which, among other provisions, **makes permanent the ECACE scholarship program**
- ✓ Continued growth of the **statewide registry of Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health (I/ECMH) consultants**, with **189 consultants (31.25% increase over FY 2023)** across all 102 counties
- ✓ Release of an **equity analysis of I/ECMH Consultation in Illinois**, coupled with a series of presentations led by the Erikson Institute to inform advocates of the report's key findings

- Increase state funding by \$12M in FY 2026 for the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) to expand the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE)**, restoring a portion of the scholarships available to incumbent educators after significant reductions in FY 2025
- Identify and establish a statewide administrative home for **Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health (I/ECMH) Consultation** to implement equity analysis recommendations, improve accessibility and increase workforce utilization

### Strong State & Community Structures

- ✓ Appropriation of **\$14.2M in FY 2025 to establish the Illinois Department of Early Childhood**, a new unified agency that will administer the state's early childhood education and care services beginning in FY 2027
- ✓ Passage of the **Department of Early Childhood Act** (SB 1; Pub. Act 103-594), authorizing the creation of a new state agency that will simplify and improve the administration of programs currently operated by three separate agencies

- Sustain or increase state funding in FY 2026 to continue transitioning to the Illinois Department of Early Childhood and building the capacity of regional intermediaries**, without reappropriating existing dollars from programs that serve expecting families, infants and toddlers
- Build capacity for the **new Illinois Department of Early Childhood to effectively integrate data, support cross-system governance and collaborate across agencies** to improve prenatal-to-age-three service delivery across the continuum of care



### Our Mission

Together, we must address the root causes of disparities and create an equitable and cohesive early childhood development support system for expecting families, infants and toddlers and the communities in which they live. We believe race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or ability should not determine the opportunities and, ultimately, the success a child experiences in life.

### Our Vision

Every expecting family, infant and toddler in Illinois should have equitable access to affordable high-quality learning experiences, health services and economic supports that they need during their most formative years—creating the strongest foundation for their success in school and life.