



Raising Illinois

2024 Accomplishments

on Behalf of Expecting Families, Infants & Toddlers

As we reflect on Fiscal Year 2024 (FY 2024), we celebrate a year of progress and growth for Illinois' youngest children and their families. The continued momentum of Governor JB Pritzker's transformative Smart Start Illinois initiative, alongside significant legislative advancements and system-wide improvements like the creation of the new Department of Early Childhood, has further solidified our commitment to supporting expecting families, infants and toddlers. Even in the face of ongoing challenges, Raising Illinois' dedicated champions and partners can take pride in our state's collective achievements that continue to make a meaningful impact during the most formative years of a child's life—the first three.

This document outlines Raising Illinois' accomplishments for FY 2024, from July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024, across the coalition's four priority areas and eight interconnected strategies within the Illinois Prenatal-to-Three Agenda. As organized in this document, work was done through budget advocacy, legislative advocacy, administrative and implementation advocacy and public awareness, engagement and mobilization. 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 to join the Raising Illinois coalition and be a part of our robust and diverse advocacy efforts.



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.



POLICY PRIORITY: HEALTHY PARENTS & BABIES

Comprehensive Perinatal Supports



Budget

- Appropriation of **\$155M in FY 2025 for the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services to increase funding for safety-net hospitals** to improve inpatient outcomes in the most under-resourced communities
- Appropriation of **\$4M in FY 2025 for the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) to develop a reproductive health action plan**, with an emphasis on community-based and full-spectrum peripartum care

Legislation



- Passage of SB 3130 (Pub. Act 103-777), **establishing pregnancy as a qualifying life event** for special enrollment in a health insurance plan once the state-based exchange is operational
- Passage of the **Family Recovery Plans Implementation Task Force Act** (SB 3136; Pub. Act 103-941), creating an inter-agency task force to develop recommendations for Illinois to implement a model for serving infants with prenatal substance exposure that is less punitive for families
- Passage of **Liam's Law** (SB 3182; Pub. Act 103-948), requiring hospitals to notify the gestational parent of a stillborn fetus of the **parent's right to receive a certificate of birth resulting in stillbirth**
- 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
- Passage of HB 5493 (Pub. Act 103-718), **prohibiting prior authorization** by health insurers for **obstetric or gynecologic care**

Administration and Implementation



- Expansion of **Family Connects Chicago**, a Universal Newborn Support Services (UNSS) model, to **10 birthing hospitals** in the City of Chicago, reaching over **7,800 families**
- Continued implementation of **Family Connects in Peoria and Stephenson counties**, reaching nearly **2,250 families** combined
- Ongoing implementation of **Medicaid coverage for doula services and lactation support services**, as directed under the Improving Health Care for Pregnant and Postpartum Individuals Act (SB 967; Pub. Act 102-665)
- Development of recommendations to the Early Learning Council for **cross-system standards for doula services** as an enhancement to existing state-funded home visiting services
- Advancement of key strategies within the **Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant Action Plan**, administered by IDPH

Public Awareness, Engagement and Mobilization



- 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
- Continued operation of **The Gathering**, a campaign developed by EverThrive Illinois to address maternal morbidity and mortality in the City of Chicago, reaching more than **20,000 Black birthing people and their families**
- Socialization of key findings from the third release of the **Illinois Maternal Morbidity and Mortality Report**, published by IDPH

POLICY PRIORITY: HEALTHY PARENTS & BABIES

Strengthened Home Visiting System



Budget

- 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**, with at least 25% of new funding set aside for Prevention Initiative prenatal-to-age-three programs, including home visiting
- Appropriation of a **21.8% increase (\$5M) in FY 2025 for the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to expand the Healthy Families Illinois and Maternal Child Home Visiting programs**, stabilizing the workforce and increasing access for families



Administration and Implementation

- Administration of **\$22.9M in general revenue funds for IDHS Healthy Families Illinois and Maternal Child Home Visiting programs**, serving over **5,500 parents and children** combined
- Federal award of **nearly \$12M for the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program** in Illinois, serving nearly **2,400 parents and children**
- Grants totaling **\$2.7M (10% increase) for ISBE Prevention Initiative Home Visiting programs**, serving an estimated **428 additional infants and toddlers**
- Inclusion of **Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation** in the IDHS Home Visiting Expansion Notice of Funding Opportunity for FY 2025
- Ongoing coordination to **align home visiting program requirements, standards and salary floors** across funding streams



Public Awareness, Engagement and Mobilization

- Administration and analysis of the **Gateways Staffing and Salary Survey and MIECHV Survey** to inform workforce recommendations
- 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



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



POLICY PRIORITY: FINANCIALLY SECURE FAMILIES

Family-friendly Work Policies



Legislation

- 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**
- Municipal passage of the **Chicago Paid Leave and Paid Sick and Safe Leave Ordinance**, increasing the minimum amount of paid time off that most workers in Chicago can earn per year to up to 40 hours of paid time off and up to 40 hours of paid sick and safe time off, effective FY 2025



Administration and Implementation

- 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
- Publication of the **final rule on Initial Activity Search for Child Care Assistance Program eligibility**, permitting up to three months of subsidized early care and learning while the parent or other relative is looking for employment or education, although this policy is subject to appropriation



Public Awareness, Engagement and Mobilization

- Launch of **“know your rights” toolkits**, developed by Women Employed, **for the new paid leave laws** both in the City of Chicago and at the state level



POLICY PRIORITY: FINANCIALLY SECURE FAMILIES

Income Supports for Families



Budget

- Appropriation of **\$50M in FY 2025 for the Illinois Department of Revenue to implement the new state-level Child Tax Credit for nearly 400,000 families** who are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit and have children under age 12
- Appropriation of **\$10M in FY 2025 for the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services to implement the new Medical Debt Relief Pilot Program**, which will forgive the medical debt of over **300,000 eligible Illinoisans**
- Appropriation of **\$1M in FY 2025 for the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to implement the Diaper Distribution Pilot Program**, which will provide a diaper allowance to eligible families in two pilot communities



Legislation

- 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
- Passage of the **Medical Debt Relief Act** (HB 5290; Pub. Act 103-647), establishing a pilot program to acquire and discharge the medical debt of eligible low- and middle-income Illinois residents



Administration and Implementation

- Publication of the **final rule making permanent the increased cash-value voucher/benefit and food package flexibility** through the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- 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**
- Creation of an advisory group to launch the **Chicago Empowerment Fund, a new guaranteed income program** in the City of Chicago based on the Chicago Resilient Communities Pilot, which will distribute \$500 per month for twelve months to eligible individuals



Public Awareness, Engagement and Mobilization

- Ongoing development of both **statewide and local outreach and mobile enrollment campaigns for WIC**, led by the Greater Chicago Food Depository, to improve awareness, challenge misperceptions and drive participation in WIC, with a planned launch in FY 2025

POLICY PRIORITY: STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE

Cross-system Preparation, Professional Development & Support



Budget

- Appropriation of **\$5.25M in FY 2025 to the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) to implement the Human Services Professional Loan Repayment Program** for the first time since its authorization in 2022
- Appropriation of **\$5M in FY 2025 to ISAC to operate the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) scholarship program**, partially replacing expiring federal funds
- Appropriation of **\$2M in FY 2025 to the Illinois Department of Public Health to continue mental health trainings for the frontline pediatric workforce**



Legislation

- Passage of the FY 2025 Budget Implementation Act (HB 4959; Pub. Act 103-588), which, among other provisions, **makes permanent the ECACE scholarship program**



Administration and Implementation

- 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
- Continued administration of the **ECACE scholarship program**, awarding roughly **\$78M in FY 2024**, reaching **4,700 students**
- Ongoing trainings for clinicians to use **DC:0-5, an age-appropriate mental health diagnostic tool**, as required by Pub. Act 101-654, reaching nearly **500 professionals**



Public Awareness and Engagement

- 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

POLICY PRIORITY: STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE

Strong State & Community Structures



Budget

- 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



Legislation

- 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



Administration and Implementation

- Application for the federal **Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Renewal Grant**, under which Illinois, if selected, could receive up to \$27M over three years to strengthen coordination, quality and outcomes of prenatal-to-age-three and early childhood services