Raising Illinois

RAISING ILLINOIS, FY2027 PRIORITIES

This document outlines Raising Illinois' goals for FY 2027, across the coalition's six issue areas and three interconnected goals within the Illinois Prenatal-to-Three Policy Agenda. As organized in this document, efforts will be advanced through budget advocacy, legislative advocacy, administrative and implementation advocacy and public awareness, engagement and mobilization.

October, 2026

Raising Illinois

INTRODUCTION

Raising Illinois, powered by Start Early, is a collective effort to create an equitable and cohesive system of supports for expecting families, infants, toddlers and the communities in which they live. This document outlines our coalition's priorities in **Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 (July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027)** to advance the objectives set by the Raising Illinois Prenatal-to-Three (PN3) Policy Agenda for the five-year period from FY 2025 to FY 2029. These objectives span **six issue areas across three interconnected goals**:

- *Healthy Parents and Babies*
  - Perinatal Supports
  - Home Visiting
- *High-Quality Early Development and Learning*
  - Early Care and Learning
  - Early Intervention
- *Stable Workforce and Thriving Families*
  - Economic Security
  - Cross-System Workforce

This document categorizes priorities for each issue area under **four policy advancement strategies**:

- Budget advocacy
- Legislative advocacy
- Administrative and implementation advocacy
- Public awareness, engagement and mobilization

As we look to the year ahead, Raising Illinois seeks to secure and build on the progress we have made together for our state's youngest children, their families and those who care for them. Our priorities in FY 2027 can only be achieved by advocates statewide who are united in their commitment to advancing transformative change across the prenatal-to-three continuum. Visit www.raisingillinois.org/get-involved to join Raising Illinois and be a part of our robust and diverse advocacy efforts.

Raising Illinois

PERINATAL SUPPORTS

Budget

- Preserve **existing federal funding streams for maternal and child health**, including Medicaid, Title V and the Maternal Health Innovation Program
- Supplement lost federal funding in the FY 2028 state budget wherever possible to protect access to maternal care, including through support for **safety-net hospitals and Federally Qualified Health Centers**
- Sustain state funding in FY 2028 for community-based initiatives to improve maternal health and birth outcomes through the **Birth Equity Innovation Seed Grants**

Legislation

- Explore feasibility of state legislation to **mitigate federal changes to Medicaid and protect access to health care** for pregnant and postpartum families

Administration & Implementation

- Continue building **community and state capacity for Universal Newborn Support Systems (UNSS)** through:
    - Ongoing support for existing models in the City of Chicago, Peoria County, Stephenson County, and Winnebago County
    - Expansion in Jo Daviess County
    - Development of state infrastructure, as authorized under Pub. Act 104-499
- Ensure the implementation of **new unbundled insurance billing codes for maternity care** promotes more flexible and individualized patient care
- Advance activities to improve positive maternal health and birth outcomes identified by the **Illinois Multi-Sector Maternal Health Strategy, Illinois Community-Based Birth Justice Strategic Plan and Birth Center Task Force Strategic Plan,** in collaboration with the Illinois Department of Public Health, Health and Medicine Policy Research Group and the Black Midwifery Collective

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Elevate **community-based provider needs regarding participation in Medicaid billing** for covered services by midwives, doulas, lactation specialists, community health workers and home visitors
- Identify barriers doulas face in providing services in hospitals and develop recommendations to support **improved access to doula services in clinical settings**, particularly for Medicaid beneficiaries, as directed under Pub. Act 104-9

Raising Illinois

HOME VISITING

Budget

- Increase FY 2028 state funding by **$5 million** for the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) **Maternal and Child Home Visiting Program** to continue stabilizing home visitor wages, streamline programs and expand services to reach more families, especially those with complex needs
- Increase FY 2028 state funding for the IDEC **Early Childhood Block Grant** to at least allow for **cost-of-living adjustments** for grantees, including Prevention Initiative-Home Visiting programs

Legislation

- Build momentum for the federal reauthorization of the **Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program**, which currently expires on September 30, 2027

Administration & Implementation

- Ensure the **effective consolidation of home visiting administration under IDEC**, with changes to funding design and program standards alignment that are responsive to the needs of the workforce and families
- Support provider training, certification and funding integration of **Medicaid coverage for home visiting services**

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Promote broader **engagement, information sharing and feedback opportunities** between IDEC, home visiting program staff and families
- Create and disseminate informational resources for home visitors, families and the public to **strengthen connections and referrals across PN3-serving systems**, including Universal Newborn Support Systems and Early Intervention

Raising Illinois

EARLY CARE & LEARNING

Budget

- Increase FY 2028 state funding by at least **$80 million** for the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) **Child Care Assistance Program** to support a 9% rate increase for center-based providers
- Increase FY 2028 state funding by **$32 million** for the IDEC **Smart Start Workforce Grants** to maintain non-competitive eligibility
- Increase FY 2028 state funding for the IDEC **Early Childhood Block Grant** to at least allow for **cost-of-living adjustments** for grantees, including Prevention Initiative-Center Based programs
- Preserve **existing federal funding streams** for Early Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant, and supplement any lost funding or eligibility restrictions in the FY 2028 state budget wherever possible

Administration & Implementation

- Ensure **IDEC's proposed funding design framework** adequately reflects the unique needs and costs associated with serving infants and toddlers across both center- and home-based programs
- Ensure equitable access to **funding for community-based organizations to make capital improvements** through the Early Childhood Construction Grants, with prioritization for building new infant-toddler classrooms

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Promote broader **engagement, information sharing and feedback opportunities** between IDEC, infant-toddler educators and families

Raising Illinois

EARLY INTERVENTION

Budget

- Increase FY 2028 state funding by at least **$40 million** for the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) **Early Intervention** (EI) to substantially raise reimbursement rates for providers and continue reducing the gap in the modeled cost of services

Administration & Implementation

- Adopt the proposed administrative rulemaking to **change the EI sliding fee schedule** so that families would **pay no fees if their household income falls below 319%**, rather than 186%, of the Federal Poverty Level
- Align the **state dispute resolution procedures** for EI with the comparable procedures for special education under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Continue mobilizing families, providers and other stakeholders to advocate for **increased state investment in EI** through lawmaker outreach, petitions, media coverage and other activities
- Improve **public awareness of families' procedural rights** regarding EI services and support parents in **filing state complaints** to seek a resolution after a violation of EI timelines

Raising Illinois

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Budget

- Preserve **existing federal funding streams** for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other safety net programs, and supplement any lost funding in the FY 2028 state budget wherever possible
- Increase FY 2028 state funding for the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to expand the **Diaper Distribution Pilot Program** or establish **another diaper benefit or an unconditional maternal cash assistance program** to serve more communities

Legislation

- 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

Administration & Implementation

- Through the **Families Receiving Emergency Support for Hunger (FRESH) program**, disburse **one-time cash assistance of $400** to individuals who have had their SNAP benefits terminated due to expanded federal work requirements, as directed under the FY 2027 Budget Implementation Act (Pub. Act. 104-466)
- Establish locally or privately funded guaranteed income pilot programs to offer **unconditional maternal cash assistance** using IDHS distribution methods, as authorized under Pub. Act 104-470
- Increase **WIC outreach and referrals for families enrolled in programs administered by the Illinois Department of Early Childhood**, building on the ongoing collaboration between IDHS and the Illinois Head Start Association
- **Reduce Illinois' SNAP payment error rate** by streamlining administrative processes to avoid the new federal cost-sharing penalty

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Mobilize families, employers and other stakeholders to build momentum for **paid family and medical leave** through lawmaker outreach, storytelling and other activities
- Increase the **WIC coverage rate**, particularly for children ages 1-3, through ongoing **public awareness, outreach and mobile enrollment activities**

Raising Illinois

CROSS-SYSTEM WORKFORCE

Budget

- Increase FY 2028 state funding for **early childhood pipeline and pathways programs**, including the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity, Early Childhood Apprenticeship and Human Services Professional Loan Repayment Program
- Preserve **existing federal funding streams** for higher education scholarships and loan forgiveness programs, and supplement any lost funding in the FY 2028 state budget wherever possible

Legislation

- Expand **eligibility for the Human Services Professional Loan Repayment Program** to include community-based human services professionals whose employer receives funding from the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC), as well as individuals who work as independent contractors for Early Intervention

Administration & Implementation

- Ensure the **effective integration of workforce supports administered by IDEC**, including cross-training and mental health consultation
- Connect providers to **additional cross-training offerings** that meet professional development requirements across early childhood provider types

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Continue **building awareness and mobilizing support for state-funded pipeline and pathways programs** for the PN3 workforce
- Support new and ongoing efforts to **recruit prospective PN3 providers and retain incumbent workers**, both locally and statewide