



Federal Policy Priorities for the 114th Congress

Research shows that children who gain a solid educational foundation in the first five years of life are significantly more likely to be successful in school, college, career and life. Guaranteeing children a solid educational foundation before they begin kindergarten is the first crucial investment we as a state can make in a future workforce that will drive economic growth in Illinois. Quality early childhood education is a cost-effective strategy for reducing deficits and promoting growth.

The 114th Congress must prioritize funding the following programs that invest in and improve the quality of early childhood education:

Child Care and Development Block Grant

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) helps low-income families afford child care while they work or attend education or training programs and supports activities to improve the quality of care for all families. CCDBG funding supports Illinois' Child Care Assistance Program which serves more than 150,000 children per month, allowing 80,000 families to go to work, knowing their children are cared for in nurturing and developmentally appropriate settings.

CCDBG was recently reauthorized, updating the program by strengthening health and safety requirements, improving access to child care, promoting higher program quality and enhancing provider training requirements.

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start provide comprehensive early education services to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in poverty while emphasizing parent involvement. In Illinois, nearly 42,000 0- to 5-year olds are served by Head Start and Early Head Start annually. The comprehensive services, early childhood education, social services, health services and parent involvement are essential for low income children to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting

Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) supports the implementation and expansion of evidence-based home visiting programs that help children and families address a host of health, educational and social challenges that at-risk families face, including poor birth outcomes, child abuse and neglect, childhood cognitive disabilities, and poor school readiness and academic achievement. Home visiting programs in Illinois serve

Federal Policy Priorities for the 114th Congress

just over 17,000, less than 10% of the eligible population. March 31st, 2015 is the reauthorization deadline for MIECHV. The 114th Congress should reauthorize MIECHV at the current funding level of \$400m.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) authorizes federal funding for pre-K-12 education programs administered by states. Title I funding, which provides school districts money to serve low-income at-risk children can also be used to provide early childhood services for children birth to five. ESEA Reauthorization, schedule for 2015, provides Congress the opportunity to invest in early childhood education funding for low-income children.

Child Nutrition Programs

The Child and Adult Care food Program (CACFP) provides nutritious meals to eligible children in child care settings, including home-based, center-based, afterschool care and Head Start Programs. CACFP ensures that young children in child care receive a nutritious diet and learn good eating habits through nutrition education. CACFP is also key to quality, affordable child care, which allows children to develop fully and maintain a healthy weight and prepares children to enter school ready to learn. In Illinois, the CACFP serves more than 125,000 children in nearly 10,000 early childhood settings.

Woman, Infants and Children (WIC) is a preventive program that provides low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children with nutritious foods, nutrition education, and improved access to health care in order to prevent nutrition-related health problems in pregnancy, infancy and early childhood. WIC provides services to more than 225,000 infants and children and more than 65,000 mothers or expecting mothers in Illinois each year.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the current Child Nutrition Programs authorization, is set to expire on September 30, 2015. Besides CACFP and WIC, child nutrition programs include the School Breakfast, National School Lunch, Summer Food Service, and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Programs and WIC. These programs provide funding to ensure that low-income children have access to healthy and nutritious foods where they live, play, and learn.

Who is Illinois Action for Children?

Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) is a catalyst for organizing, developing and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most. Quality early childhood care and education is critical to promoting the social, physical and cognitive development of young children as well as in supporting low-income parents' ability to work and attend school.

For more information, please contact Samir Tanna, Assistant Director of Public Policy at (773) 564-8851