

FY2018 STATE POLICY PRIORITIES

Illinois Action for Children advocates for policies that advance our mission to organize, develop, and support strong families and powerful communities where children matter most.



Pass Responsible FY 2017 & FY 2018 State Budgets

The FY16-17 budget impasse continues to create long-lasting harm to Illinois families and the social service infrastructure. The people of Illinois – especially children, seniors, and vulnerable populations overall – deserve the certainty of an adequately funded, full-year state budget. Illinois must end the yearly battle for adequate program funding by identifying long-term, sustainable, and fair revenue sources.

Request:

- ❑ **Pass a full, adequate budget for FY17**
- ❑ **Pass a full-year FY18 budget with adequate funding and sustainable revenue sources before the regular legislative session adjourns**

Adequately Fund a Comprehensive Early Childhood System

Prioritizing a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system ensures all Illinois children are healthy, learning, and growing.

Child Care Assistance Program

Historically, Illinois has championed low-income working parents' ability to access quality, affordable child care through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). CCAP's dual role as a crucial work support and a child development tool means investments have both immediate and long-lasting impacts. In order to restore full access to programs, maintain program quality, and implement new federal standards, it is critical that the state invests the general revenue funds to meet these requirements and maximize federal funding. **Request: \$151 million increase**

Early Intervention

Early Intervention (EI) serves infants and toddlers (0-3) who have been identified to have, or are at risk for, developmental delays or disabilities. Early identification and intervention leads to better outcomes for children and lower special education costs for the state. Adequate state funding ensures the state receives federal and Medicaid funds and allows EI to meet the growing needs of Illinois children, such as exposure to lead, which is a priority of the Children's Cabinet. **Request: \$4 million increase**

Home Visiting

Also known as 'parent coaching', research based Home Visiting programs serve expectant parents and families with infants and toddlers (0-3) to promote positive parenting and healthy child development through home visits, screening, and individual family service planning. Currently, DHS Home Visiting programs are not being paid due to the lack of a state budget. **Request: \$16.9 million (level funding)**

Early Childhood Block Grant

The Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) funds the state's Preschool for All program, which provides part-day pre-k to 3 and 4 year olds. The ECBG also provides funding for programs serving infants and toddlers. After several years of cuts, the ECBG received a \$23 million restoration in FY15 and a \$79 million increase in FY16, bringing us back to 2009 funding levels, while also meeting the state's obligation for the federal Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) funding. An additional investment is required in FY18 to meet PEG obligations. **Request: \$50 million increase**

Bilingual Education

Over the past fifteen years, Illinois has experienced an 83% growth in the number of English Learners (ELs). To meet the needs of our youngest ELs, Illinois law requires preschoolers speaking a language other than English should be taught by a teacher with the proper bilingual/English as a second language endorsement. Currently, there is a shortage of educators holding the necessary endorsements. ISBE needs an additional \$38 million to address this shortage and provide all ELs throughout the state with access to the proper education. **Request: \$38 million increase**

Restore Access to the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

Changes made to CCAP in July 2015 restricted eligibility to four priority populations. While partial restoration was granted in November 2015, two groups were still left out - parents enrolled full-time in post-secondary education or in non-TANF training programs and parents that earn between 162% and 185% of federal poverty level. At least 15,000 children and 8,000 families received child care services through these eligibility criteria in 2015.

Request:

- **Expand CCAP priority populations to include non-TANF recipients needing child care to participate in education or training programs, including full-time post-secondary education**
- **Restore income eligibility back to 185% of the federal poverty level**

Support Early Childhood & K-12 Partnerships

Head Start and state funded early childhood programs are required to support smooth transitions of children out of the program and into kindergarten. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) do not have the same requirement, but the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides an opportunity to develop a framework that encourages LEAs to partner with early childhood programs in their communities to support transitions for our youngest students as they enter Kindergarten.

Request: Establish a Kindergarten Transition Advisory Committee to develop a legislative framework encouraging alignment between K-12 and early childhood to ensure successful kindergarten transitions

Reduce Preventable Expulsions in Early Childhood Settings

Suspension and expulsion practices are associated with negative developmental and educational outcomes for all children, and children expelled during their preschool years are more likely to be expelled in later grades. Without uniform standards for early childhood settings, Illinois preschoolers – particularly boys of color – are expelled at a rate three times that of their older peers. Protections against preventable expulsions, similar to those for K-12 students, should be extended to children in licensed child care and publicly funded pre-k programs. A formalized process will allow for critical data collection to determine if early childhood professionals have access to the necessary professional development, training, and technical assistance to support children with challenging behaviors.

Request: Limit expulsions of children in child care and early education settings, and ensure early childhood providers have access to necessary supports to keep children in care

Maintain Investments in School Readiness Initiatives

Illinois has invested in systems aimed at improving school readiness, focusing on early childhood data, community systems, program quality, and workforce development. These and other parts of our early childhood system were enhanced through Illinois' federal Race to the Top grant, including ExceleRate Illinois. As the state's tiered Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) for early learning, ExceleRate Illinois incentivizes all early childhood providers, including preschool, head start, and licensed child care centers and homes to reach and maintain higher quality standards. Illinois should continue investments to maintain and increase quality supports to best prepare Illinois' youngest learners for future success in school.

Request:

- **Maintain investments in the State's Quality Recognition & Improvement System (QRIS) infrastructure and Gateways Registry**
- **Build on successful Race to the Top initiatives to align all parts of the early childhood system**
- **Identify opportunities to strengthen the early childhood workforce**

For more information, contact our Policy Team:

Samir Tanna, Assistant Director of Public Policy, at samir.tanna@actforchildren.org or 773.564.8851

Maria Estlund, Policy Associate, at maria.estlund@actforchildren.org or 773.564.8875