

In This Issue: March eAdvocate

This month, we are sharing updates on Governor Pritzker's 2024 Budget Address, registration information for Early Childhood Advocacy Day 2024, and opportunities to advocate for Illinois' youngest learners! With Illinois legislative session in full swing, this is the time to make your voice heard and help create a more equitable and accessible early childhood education and care system for all.

IAFC's Response to Governor Pritzker's 2024 Budget Address

On Wednesday, February 21, 2024, Governor Pritzker unveiled his proposed Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) budget for Illinois, highlighting significant investments for children and families. IAFC is excited to see proposed investments to create the new Department of Early Childhood, continue the Smart Start Initiative to year two, and prioritize other child care needs in his FY25 budget proposal.

These are big wins for early childhood in the proposed FY25 budget. However, we need Illinois to fund the entire early childhood education and care system and ensure our incumbent workforce and early intervention programs are not left behind.

[Read the full statement here.](#)

Interested in joining our collective voice in expressing the importance of fully funding early childhood programs to Illinois lawmakers? Check out registration for Early Childhood Advocacy Day below!

Register for Early Childhood Advocacy Day 2024

Calling all advocates! Join us in Springfield, Illinois on April 16, 2024 for Early Childhood Advocacy Day with our partners Child Care for All, COFI, Start Early, Latino Policy Forum, Raising Illinois, SEIU & We, The Village. On April 16, we will head to Springfield to call on the Illinois General Assembly to support the creation of the Department of Early Childhood and urge them to prioritize investments in young children & their families as they finalize the FY25 budget. Don't miss out on this incredible opportunity to advocate for children and families in Illinois! Can't attend in person? Stay tuned for opportunities to participate virtually!

[Register for Early Childhood Advocacy Day 2024](#)

[Learn more about Early Childhood Advocacy Day 2024](#)

Take Action- Urge your Legislators to Vote “YES” to the Department of Early Childhood Act

On February 9, Senator Kimberly Lightford and State Representative Mary Beth Canty introduced legislation to establish plans for the new early childhood agency. The Department of Early Childhood Act is a monumental step towards ensuring that Illinois’ parents and providers experience an ECEC system that is simple, coordinated, and equipped to support them and the children they care for. We need you to take action today and [ask your legislator to vote YES on the Department of Early Childhood Act!](#)

Stay Informed on the Transition to the New Department of Early Childhood

The state is hosting monthly Transition Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings and bi-monthly transition updates. Members of the public may join TAC meetings in “listen-only” mode and are able to provide feedback during the bi-monthly calls.

Information for the next two meetings are below:

- Next TAC Meeting: **March 12, 2024, 5:30-7:00 pm**
- Next Bi-Monthly Listening Session: **March 15, 2024, 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm**

Additionally, if you would like to provide written feedback on the transition, you can [complete this survey](#).

Help IAFC Better Target Our Advocacy Efforts- Complete a Brief Interest Form

This spring will be packed with opportunities to engage in advocacy, and we want to send you the opportunities that are right for you! Please take a few minutes to complete our advocacy interest form in partnership with We, the Village coalition. This will help us direct advocates and coalition members to advocacy efforts that align with their interests, expertise, and community. The form should take less than five minutes to complete.

Complete the Advocacy Interest Form

Smart Start Transition Grants

Round 4 opens on April 1, 2024. INCCRRA administers these grants in order to provide stable and predictable funding to support workforce development. This will be the last round of transition grants before the transition to Smart Start Child Care, a new workforce grant program that will have different eligibility from Strengthen and Grow and Smart Start Transition Grants. Details about eligibility and awards for the new grants will be available this spring.

Go to the [website](#) for details, tip sheets, technical assistance videos, and more. If you have questions, you can email grants@inccrra.org.

Are You An Educator Interested In Developing Your Leadership Skills And Influencing Change?

Teach Plus Illinois is thrilled to announce **four different fellowships** for educators this fall:

- the **Chicago Change Agent Fellowship**,
- the **Teaching Policy Fellowship**,
- the **Early Childhood Educator Policy Fellowship**, and
- the **Affinity Group Facilitator Fellowship!**

Teach Plus Illinois' programs are highly selective leadership opportunities for outstanding teachers looking to expand their influence without leaving the classroom. They span the 2024-25 school year and offer selected teachers a generous stipend for their time and effort. For more information on any of the four, please contact Kimberly Nguyen at knguyen@teachplus.org. Applications are due between April 7 and May 1, 2024, depending on the program.

Federal Update

Tell Congress to Stabilize Childcare Now!

On February 28, Congressional leaders passed a partial budget deal that would continue level funding for programs set to expire and extended the deadline to pass a full budget for the next year to March 22. The Departments of Interior, and Justice, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency and a few other agencies, would keep their current March 8 deadlines.

We need to remind our members to protect and expand funding for child care and early learning programs. Without immediate action from Congress, states will lose critical funding to continue efforts to uplift the workforce, lower costs for families, and increase access to childcare. Act now!

Send a message to your elected officials to prioritize and invest in childcare, as they debate emergency funding and annual spending bills!

Expand the Federal Child Tax Credit

On January 31, the House passed a bipartisan tax credit bill, Tax Relief for American Families and Act of 2024, that will expand the valuable child tax credit for parents. This expansion will provide women, LGBTQIA+ people, and families with the support they need and deserve. The bill will head to the Senate for a vote, and we need you to make your voice heard and urge Illinois Senators to support the expansion of Child Tax Credit.

Click [here](#) to tell your Senators to let them know that the child tax credit is a priority for you. Additional ways to have your voice heard by clicking [here](#).

eAdvocate is a monthly digital newsletter from Illinois Action for Children's Public Policy and Advocacy Team (PPA). It includes the latest early childhood policy news and connects you to tools and resources to help effectively advocate for children and families. Our team includes: Assistant Director of Advocacy Neoma Nagahawatte; Senior Policy and Community Engagement Specialist Bri Stormer; Policy Associate Joselle Escobar; Director of Policy Michael Kim; and VP of Public Policy, Advocacy and Research Angela Farwig.