



## **Congratulate Illinois Action for Children's 2024 Recognition Recipients**

### **SYLVIA COTTON FOUNDER'S RECOGNITION**

*Presented to an individual or organization that exemplifies IAFC founder Sylvia Cotton's dedication to, and passion for, organizing and advocating for working families, ensuring that the care and education of children is a priority*

#### **Celena Roldán-Sarillo, CEO of the American Red Cross of Illinois**

Celena Sarillo serves as the CEO of the American Red Cross of Illinois, joining the Red Cross in March of 2016. The Illinois Region is the second largest region of the American Red Cross, with an annual budget of approximately \$28 million, covering 88 counties and more than 3,500 dedicated volunteers. Sarillo has served in various leadership roles supporting the national office of the American Red Cross, including serving as an elected official liaison deployed to engage elected officials in disaster impacted areas, and as one of the founders of the American Red Cross Latino Engagement Initiative. She recently completed a year-long interim assignment serving as the CEO for the Greater New York Red Cross, based in New York City. This is the largest Red Cross region in the country.

Prior to joining Red Cross, Sarillo served as the Executive Director of Erie Neighborhood House, which was founded to strengthen low-income, primarily Latino families through skill-building, access to critical resources, advocacy, and collaborative action.

Sarillo has extensive and significant community development experience at both the city and the state level. In 2018, Sarillo served as a co-chair for the City of Chicago Universal Basic Income Task Force. She also served on Mayor Rahm Emanuel's Education Transition Team and the Mayor's Early Childhood Task Force, as well as Governor Pat Quinn's Illinois Human Services Commission. Sarillo was also appointed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel to the City of Chicago's Community Development Commission in 2014.

In 2011, Sarillo was a Leadership Greater Chicago Fellow, participating in an intensive leadership training and partnership-building program that examines key issues facing the Chicago metropolitan area. In 2015, she participated in the German Marshall Memorial Fellowship, a month-long leadership development program in Europe focused on supporting and fostering the transatlantic relationship between the U.S. and Europe, sponsored by the German Marshall Fund of the United States. She was selected as a Fellow in the 2017 CEO Perspectives program, a nationally recognized program that fosters and accelerates business leadership development.

Currently, Sarillo serves as a board member for National Louis University and the Chicago Network, a network of Chicago's women leaders. In 2019, she was named to the board of directors for Wintrust Wealth Management and was elected to The Robert R. McCormick Foundation Board.

Most recently, Sarillo was recognized by the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Social Work as their 2021 Distinguished Alumni Award Recipient. Sarillo was also named as one of Chicago's "Most Powerful Latinos" on the 2019 inaugural list compiled by *Crain's Chicago Business*, and was named the 2016 Community Leader of the Year by the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago for her work in communities and the nonprofit sector.

Sarillo holds a master's degree in early childhood administration from National Louis University, as well as master's and bachelor's degrees in social work from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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## UNSUNG HEROES

*Presented to individuals who make substantive, yet often unrecognized contributions to improving the lives of children and families*

### ***Gail Nelson, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives—North Chicago, Steans Family Foundation***

Gail has worked for decades to amplify community voices and elevate issues that inform program development and public policy solutions. She is proud to say she learned everything (and almost everyone) she knows from 30+ years at the Carole Robertson Center for Learning (CRCL) on the West side of Chicago, an agency that was grown from the level of community needs up. Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) was a consistent partner in advocacy and program development throughout her career. CRCL provided critical administrative and organizing support to IAFC in its early years, and Gail later served on the IAFC Board of Directors for 23 years.

During 25 years of service as Executive Director of CRCL, Gail and her leadership team steered the center through its expansion from a single site to three, and its development into a comprehensive family service agency. Its daily center-based programs served 1,000 children and youth from birth through high school, with another 200 enrolled in home visiting programs and with family child care home partners. Early childhood training and apprenticeship programs built a highly qualified, culturally competent workforce from the local community, and multiple funding sources were integrated to provide high-quality, seamless services for all families.

Gail joined the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development in 2013 as the Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) Policy Director. Her experience brought expertise in all public funding sources and program performance standards, hands-on knowledge of workforce and provider administrative challenges, and deep respect for the invaluable impact of family, staff, and provider voice in system design and service delivery.

Gail joined the Steans Family Foundation in 2017, where she currently serves as Director of Early Childhood Initiatives for their North Chicago team. Gail works throughout Lake County with local schools, community early childhood providers, home visiting programs, and health and social

service partners to connect families with high quality programs that support kindergarten readiness for children in North Chicago.

Gail attended the University of Illinois at Chicago and earned her M.A. at the Crown School of Social Work at the University of Chicago with a concentration in Community Development and Organization. Gail considers her career a very happy accident, as she meant to go to law school. She is glad she did not, and she is grateful for the wisdom and expertise of all the parents and youth, colleagues and mentors, advocates and rabble-rousers—from the West side and throughout the state—who provided her with such excellent on-the-job training.

***Phyllis Glink, Executive Director, Irving Harris Foundation***

Phyllis Glink is the Executive Director of the Irving Harris Foundation. In her more than two decades with the Foundation, she has helped to develop and implement its grantmaking and field leadership strategies in the areas of early childhood development and infant and early childhood mental health, reproductive health and justice, Jewish values, and social justice. Glink works closely with the Foundation's team and the Foundation's partners in the nonprofit, advocacy, philanthropy, and government communities to leverage shared investments and maximize the impact of Foundation grants in Illinois and across the country. Glink holds many leadership roles in the public and philanthropic sectors, including serving as co-chair of the Governor's Early Learning Council, chair of the BUILD Advisory Board and co-chair of the Early Relational Health committee at the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative. She was a commissioner on the Illinois Commission on Equitable Funding for Early Childhood Education and Care, the Advisory Board of the National Center of Excellence in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, and a long-serving member of the State's Childcare Advisory Board. Glink served on the transition teams for Governor JB Pritzker, Governor Bruce Rauner, Mayor Lori Lightfoot, and President Barack Obama. She has been recognized for her leadership over the years by many organizations including the Anti-Defamation League, Health Connect One, Personal PAC, and UNICEF.

Prior to joining the Irving Harris Foundation, Glink worked for the Chicago Community Trust focusing on grantmaking and program development in the areas of education and women and girls' issues. Glink started her career in philanthropy at the University of Chicago, where she worked for seven years in the Central Development Office as a major gifts officer raising funds for the successful \$650 million capital campaign.

Glink earned her master's in public policy from the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and her B.A. from the University of Michigan.

***Sara Slaughter, Executive Director, W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation***

In 2015, Sara Slaughter was named Executive Director of the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation, where she oversees investments designed to build equitable systems in K-12 education, early childhood education, and youth development in five major urban areas. Prior to joining the Stone Foundation, she served for 10 years at the Robert R. McCormick Foundation as the Director of the Education Program, and during her tenure, the Council on Foundations awarded the Education Program the 2008 Paul Ylvisaker Award for Public Policy Engagement.

Ms. Slaughter's focus on supporting equitable systems is also informed by her experience in the fields of law and government. She clerked for a federal district court judge following her

graduation from law school and then served as a litigation associate at Kirkland & Ellis in Chicago. From 2004 until 2007, Ms. Slaughter also served as a policy advisor to former Indiana Governor, Evan Bayh.

Ms. Slaughter is a member of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, and served as its chair for almost four years, guiding the organization through a two-year strategic planning process that resulted in hiring its first Executive Director. She has served in leadership roles in a variety of early childhood and education organizations, and currently is a member of the Education Funders Strategy Group, the Illinois Early Learning Council, and the Metropolitan Family Services Head Start Oversight Board.

Ms. Slaughter holds a bachelor's degree from Duke University and a Juris Doctorate from Indiana University Maurer School of Law—Bloomington. She resides in Chicago and is the proud mom of two graduates of Chicago Public Schools. When she isn't thinking about equitable systems, she enjoys spending time with her family, walking her two labrador retrievers, and riding horses.

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## CHAMPIONS FOR CHILDREN

*Presented to leaders or organizations that, through a commitment to early care and education, have created the promise of a brighter future for children throughout Illinois.*

### ***Representative Mary Beth Canty***

Elected to the Illinois General Assembly in 2022, State Representative Mary Beth Canty represents the 54th District, which includes Arlington Heights, Palatine, and Prospect Heights, and portions of Buffalo Grove, Mt. Prospect, and Wheeling. She is an attorney, having earned a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary and a law degree from the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law.

In her time in office thus far, Representative Canty has proven herself to be a champion of issues impacting children and families—and, more specifically, early childhood services and public education. In the first session of her first term, she passed legislation expanding access to full-day kindergarten for Illinois students. The law requires all school districts to offer full-day programming, with a ramp to support them in doing so by the 2027–28 school year.

Canty's accomplishments in her second legislative session included additional initiatives to advance education and improve services for the state's youngest. She was a key player in the passage of SB1, which will create the Department of Early Childhood, streamlining and simplifying services for families, providers, and educators. The Department will centralize programs currently housed across the Department of Child and Family Services, the Department of Human Services, and the Illinois State Board of Education. A unified agency will provide higher quality, more equitable early childhood services. Additionally, she successfully advocated for a robust child tax credit for Illinois' working families, assisting them in meeting their basic needs. These funds will enable families to buy school supplies, groceries, and other essentials. It will provide relief to families in every corner of the state, dramatically cutting rates of child poverty in Illinois.

Within her district, Canty actively advocates for and engages with local schools. She enjoys meeting with students and administrators alike and actively seeks out opportunities to discuss educator diversity and initiatives to support student success within the classroom and beyond. She is a Hunt Kean Leadership Fellow with the Hunt Institute, which provides programming for equity-minded state legislators to prepare them to develop effective education policy. She will serve on the Institute's Educator Diversity Task Force, as well. Other policies that Canty has passed have improved pay equity by requiring employers to post pay ranges in job listings; improved food access by offering grants to independent grocery stores operating in food deserts; and supported the development of family recovery plans for pregnant women managing substance abuse and their babies. Canty looks forward to continuing her work, aiming to protect children from exploitation and ensuring survivors of gender-based violence are free to come forward without the risk of retaliation, alongside her ongoing efforts to improve early childhood services and public education for Illinois children and families.

### ***Representative Joyce Mason***

Representative Joyce Mason has proudly represented the 61st house district in Illinois since 2019. Born and raised in Chicago, she attended Chicago Public Schools, then earned a B.A. in Communications from the University of Illinois at Chicago and an M.B.A. from Keller Graduate School of Management. She moved to Lake County in 1999.

Joyce serves as a full-time legislator, dedicated to making her community a better place for all residents. In 2023, she was appointed chairperson of the House Childcare Accessibility and Early Childhood Education committee, and additionally serves on the following committees: Adoption and Child Welfare; Elementary and Secondary Education Curriculum & Policies; Labor & Commerce; and Consumer Protection.

Prior to joining the state legislature, Joyce served as the Vice President of the Woodland Community Consolidated School District for two years. She has worked as an educator, teaching both at the elementary and graduate school levels as well as writing curriculum at the college level.

Joyce is a tireless advocate for strengthening public education, promoting literacy, ensuring child welfare, preventing domestic violence, and protecting our environment. She is a 2023 National Conference of State Legislatures Child Welfare Fellow. Her most important job is being mom to Julia, a third-grade teacher, and Grant, a college student.

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