



# Illinois Policy

Start Early’s vision for Illinois is that its early childhood system is designed, implemented and sustained to equitably provide a continuum of high-quality services to Illinois’ children before birth and through age 5. To best support all of our state’s families, services must be culturally, linguistically and ability responsive.

This report represents advancements of efforts represented in our [Illinois Policy Agenda](#) during Fiscal Year 2022.



## POLICY AGENDA INITIATIVE #1

# Increase investments in and strengthen the design and implementation of Illinois' core early care and learning programs

### Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG):

- Led successful efforts resulting in a \$54.4 million increase for the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG). This included ensuring the increase was included in all proposed versions of the FY23 state budget as well as in the final enacted budget.
- Announced uses of the budget increase align with Start Early recommendations of targeted increases for current community-based providers intended to address compensation disparities

### Home Visiting:

- Led successful efforts resulting in a \$1 million increase in the final enacted budget to home visiting programs funded by the Department of Human Services (DHS). This represents the first new investment in these programs in nearly two decades and will help support needed improvements in salaries for home visitors and other program staff, among other uses.
- Ensured use of federal COVID-19 funds to support increased salaries for Maternal Child Home Visiting home visitors (formerly Parents Too Soon).
- Provided recommendations and research to the DHS Healthy Families funding opportunity that resulted in establishing a salary floor for home visitors. This change will result in salary improvements for Healthy Families home visitors.
- Informed the DHS Healthy Families funding opportunity by lifting program concerns to inform state staff and advocated for Start Early priorities. Items of note included in the final funding opportunity include increased public awareness of the opportunity, funding for Infant Early Childhood Mental Health consultation and other infrastructure elements.
- Provided recommendations to the Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) for implementation of Medicaid financing for home visiting services, developed through a Home Visiting Sustainability Subcommittee engagement process with providers, parents and advocates.
- Created a new home visiting staffing and salary survey that will be distributed in FY23 and led recommendations for data field updates to the Gateways registry. This survey will also

help gather cross-funder information on challenges with staff recruitment and retention, Professional Development and training needs, and other workforce trends.

- Convened home visiting programs as well as key external and internal partners to develop Illinois and Start Early priorities for MIECHV (Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting) reauthorization which fueled discussion at national tables.
- Oriented key members of the Illinois Congressional delegation on MIECHV reauthorization and Illinois priorities, bringing program voice by partnering with local home visiting agencies.
- Surveyed parents and program staff on their experiences with home visiting and discussed the findings with key public and private partners.
- Analyzed, developed, and presented recommendations from the Home Visiting task force to the Interagency Team to improve funding coordination across funders.
- Authored a brief on reflections shared by Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants and other providers supporting home visiting professionals throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Contributed to efforts to update the “Parents Too Soon” budget/program name to “Maternal Child Home Visiting,” importantly shifting away from a deficit-frame.

### Child Care

- Informed and advocated for FY22 Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) improvements implemented July 1, 2021, including increased reimbursement rates, reduced family copayments and increased income eligibility. Key improvements also included a one-time payments to the child care workforce (“hero pay”) and further extension of child care eligibility for job search activities.
- Produced and released the “[\*Infant & Toddler Child Care Roadmap\*](#),” with recommendations informed by infant toddler providers to improve access to quality infant toddler child care.
- Informed and advocated for CCAP policy changes for FY23 effective July 1, 2022, including increased rates, increased income levels for entry and exit eligibility, essentially no-cost child care for child care staff who are eligible for CCAP, elimination of copays for homeless families, continuation of job search time period.
- Provided written recommendations to DHS to use federal COVID relief funds to provide dedicated inclusion supports to child care providers. The recommendations were formally approved by the DHS Child Care Advisory Council.
- Surveyed child care providers on knowledge of and input on the Department of Children and Family Services background check policy changes and recommended next steps.

## Services for Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays:

- Led efforts to ensure the final enacted budget included \$6 million increase for Early Intervention, erasing a previous cut to the program and ensuring a 3% rate increase for therapists.
- Provided requested recommendations for next steps for Early Intervention system transformation focused on workforce compensation, caseloads, and equitable access to services.
- Led efforts to enact [Public Act 102-0962](#), which codifies the timeline for Early Intervention services to begin, creating greater transparency for families and accountability for the system.
- Led efforts to help key contributors understand and explore opportunities and barriers for inclusion practices across all early childhood settings, including the release of "[Strengthening Early Childhood Inclusion](#)," and presentations on the findings for the Head Start Personnel Technical Assistance Center disabilities workgroup, the National Head Start Association conference and the 2022 International Inclusion Institute.
- Facilitated partnerships and funding to advance transformation in the Early Childhood Special Education System, including models for Illinois to best support children with delays and disabilities in community settings and needed changes to the current funding formula.
- Facilitated discussions about inclusive practices in community-based settings in the City of Chicago with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and its diverse learner supports committee and facilitated the execution of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Chicago Public Schools and Chicago Head Start programs.
- Successful application and partnership for a two-year grant to develop and pilot an inclusion model with CPS and Head Start delegates.
- Advocated for Chicago Public Schools to re-convene data dialogue meetings to review data on children in Head Start programs who are being identified, referred, evaluated, and placed in Chicago Public Schools for special education and related services. Also successfully advocated to expand the type of data being reviewed and the level of problem-solving to occur during these meetings.
- Educated key members of the Chicago Board of Education on the importance of bringing inclusive community-based services to children with disabilities who are enrolled in community-based early childhood programs.

## POLICY AGENDA INITIATIVE #2

## Strengthen the infrastructure of Illinois' early care and learning system

- Led efforts to enact [Public Act 102-0926](#) to increase participation by children engaged with the child welfare system in Early Intervention and the Child Care Assistance Program. PA102-0926 makes these children eligible for Early Intervention services, and 1) provides providers serving other child welfare-involved families receive the same level of payment from DCFS as they would for CCAP and requires reporting on DCFS child care services.
- Made significant contributions to the Mayor's Office and Birth to Five Illinois' launch of the newly integrated Every Child Ready Chicago (ECRC)-Birth to Five Action Council, including briefings on the history of ECRC, alignment on membership, functions, as well as with two launch events attended by more than 200 people, which also featured a presentation about the Chicago Early Childhood Integrated Data System.
- Supported the launch and ongoing work of the ECRC Family and Community Engagement Committee, providing updates on planning with the state and input on the committee's recommendations.
- Informed and supported the launch of the 5-year Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant cross sector advisory council (Maternal Health Task Force Care Coordination Committee), charged with overseeing the planning for expansion of Universal Newborn Support Systems across the state.
- Advocated with the Department of Healthcare and Family Services to extend their implementation of additional postnatal visits included in [Public Act 102-665](#) to allow Family Connects programs to also bill Medicaid for a nurse home visit.
- Aligned advocacy efforts with partners to press for the establishment of Early Learning Council committees to support the administration in early childhood systems-building.
- Contributed to improvements in other child-serving systems through written comments to DHS regarding the draft Illinois interagency plan to prevent and end homelessness, highlighting the needs of families experiencing homelessness.
- Organized a coalition of 17 early childhood providers, advocates, and parents to agree on and deliver recommendations to the Mayor's Office and City Council, which resulted in increased investment in local funding for city-level early childhood infrastructure.

### POLICY AGENDA INITIATIVE #3

## Recruit and retain a representative, well-compensated and qualified early care and learning workforce, with a particular focus on those who work with infants and toddlers

- Provided public comment and testimony on the importance of language focused on early childhood in the proposed changes for the Part 25 Educator Licensure rules which resulted in understandable language allowing student teaching in community-based settings and allowing candidates to have field experiences across the age groups relevant to the ECE (Early Care and Education) endorsement (birth to grade 2).
- Worked with external partners to protect the necessary ECE experience for school leaders through the Part 30 Principal Preparation proposed rule changes and updated “pre-k” references to read “early childhood education.”
- Contributed to and organized advocacy on behalf of recommendations to provide 6 credits for early childhood staff who hold or earn the preschool and infant toddler Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. The recommendations were unanimously approved by the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity, with implementation initially required by January 2023 for the preschool CDA, and infant toddler CDA by January 2024.
- As referenced above, secured funding increases in the Early Childhood Block Grant, Early Intervention and home visiting that are leading to compensation increases.

#### POLICY AGENDA INITIATIVE #4

## Improve the health, mental health and well-being of young children and their families in Illinois

- Provided COVID-19-related information to Early Head Start/Head Start health managers and key staff, including information from the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics on masking recommendations (in response to the lifting of the statewide mask mandate) and vaccinations for children ages 5-11, as well as information about the impact on Medicaid redetermination once the Public Health Emergency ends.
- Authored blog post in support of the governor's requirement for all staff working in child care settings licensed by the state to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Contributed to City of Chicago planning in advance of distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 0-5.
- Successfully advocated for increased access to Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health consultants (I/ECMHCs) with federal COVID-19 funds; DHS doubled the number of consultants available
- Provided significant contributions to the recently-released updated Illinois Model of Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation.
- Supported planning and implementation of the I/ECMHC annual retreat and presented a State of the State presentation along with the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD and the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) to about 130 I/ECMHCs.
- Contributed to the IL Children's Mental Health Partnership's State Plan, ensuring I/ECMH priorities and issues were addressed.
- Supported public partners in their work on planning and implementation of legislation requiring use of an age-appropriate mental health diagnostic tool. Work focused on training, billing, and guidance/best practices for mental health practitioners.
- Contributed to the finalization of public awareness materials promoting Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and the related state initiative.
- Presented to the National Alliance on Mental Illness Chicago (mental health and wellness organization) and the Illinois Association of Medicaid Health Plans on Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health, reaching about 200 clinicians across the state.

## POLICY AGENDA INITIATIVE #5

# Improve economic security for families with young children

- Contributed early childhood expertise to LIFT-Chicago/WTTW event “Firsthand: Living in Poverty”
- Connected Child Tax Credit advocates to key early childhood partners for local outreach to encourage families to access available tax credits.
- Continued to advocate for the end of harmful public charge policies.
- Supported successful coalition efforts to expand the Earned Income Credit (EIC) benefit for all filers and to extend eligibility to the EIC for those aged 18-25 or over 65 and those who file using an ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number) number (rather than a social security number).

## OTHER KEY FY22 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

# Outreach and Engagement

Start Early strengthened efforts to use bidirectional communication with families, providers and communities, including:

- Undertook virtual Early Childhood Advocacy Day, generating more than 700 constituent contacts with lawmakers in support of our budget requests, in coordination with additional partner and coalition days of action.
- Engaged home visiting programs in opportunities/advocacy tips & training for state budget advocacy and MIECHV reauthorization activities at multiple model and program tables.
- Presented state budget, state legislative, and MIECHV reauthorization updates and advocacy opportunities at a range of coalitions and tables (e.g. IL Trauma Coalition, the IL Association for Infant Mental Health, We, the Village, National Association of Social Workers-Illinois Chapter).
- Created and disseminated MIECHV advocacy toolkit for use by programs, parents, and other supporters.
- Supported the National Home Visiting Summit Advocacy & Policy Community of Practice’s parent leadership and engagement activities and the creation of a new series of parent advocacy videos.



## Raising Illinois Coalition

In addition to Raising Illinois' policy wins, Start Early's coalition backbone role also supported the following accomplishments:

- Launched the coalition's website
- Held virtual public gathering event attended by more than 500 participants, featuring parents, providers, lawmakers, and Governor Pritzker.
- Secured funding to support race equity work within Raising Illinois, including the launch of the [Family Leaders](#) program.
- Supported the inaugural Raising Illinois parent town hall
- Secured funding that resulted in the release of the Prenatal to Three supplemental data report to the Illinois Risk and Reach Report issued by the Erikson Institute.

## Thought Leadership

IPT and other states/national presence:

- Led efforts to help key contributors understand and explore opportunities and barriers for inclusion practices across all early childhood settings, including the release of ["Opportunities for Strengthened Inclusion"](#) and presentations for the Head Start Personnel Technical Assistance Center disabilities workgroup, the National Head Start Association conference and the 2022 International Inclusion Institute.
- Contributed to Start Early efforts to collaboratively develop a federal policy agenda for children with delays and disabilities and convened national partners to strategize its advancement.
- Brought Start Early and Illinois perspectives to U.S. Dept of Education Office of Special Education Programs listening session with national leaders on challenges to referral and evaluation to Early Intervention.
- Provided consultation on state home visiting system issues with OH, PA, WV, CA, CO.
- Consultation with PA on Illinois' innovative work with families experiencing incarceration.
- Presentations, consultation and thought partnership on infant and early childhood mental health issues to Portland State University, the Tennessee Association for Infant Mental Health, First Five LA and contributions to ["Reducing Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Early Childhood Education: Perspectives from Practitioners in Illinois and Colorado."](#)
- With public partners, presented at the national Center of Excellence for I/ECMHC's Equity from the Start conference.

- Co-facilitated a webinar for the National Home Visiting Summit Advocacy and Policy Community of Practice on family engagement in Home Visiting advocacy with a parent leader/co-facilitator and parent panel discussion.
- Highlighted the Illinois iGrow (home visiting) website and IL's Medicaid financing for doula and home visiting services efforts to a national audience at a meeting of the Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice.
- Contributed to the Migration Policy Institute's National Roundtable for Effective and Equitable Early Childhood Services for DLL (Dual Language Learner) and Immigrant-Background Children, including elevating Start Early's MIECHV reauthorization priorities and work to include recommendations for reauthorization that prioritize strategies supporting DLL families and racially disaggregated program data. MPI acknowledged that work during the meeting.
- Facilitated adding Illinois early childhood organizations to a field-wide call to the US Department of Education to prioritize early learning.
- Contributed to the policy competency section of the Specialized Practice Curricular Guide for Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health released by the Council for Social Work Education and Erikson Institute.
- Presentations at the National Association for the Education of Homeless Young Children conference on the early childhood system and infant-toddler supports.

###