

Grow, strengthen the state's early childhood system through an FY25 budget that includes significant increases in funding, some of which are likely to be outlined in Year Two of *Smart Start Illinois*

- **Increases, at a minimum, funding for the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) by \$75 million (11.1%).** Funds would allow ISBE to increase compensation for those working with infants and toddlers and those employed by community-based organizations. It would also support efforts to expand slots, particularly for our youngest learners.
- **Increases, at a minimum, funding for child care, including the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), by \$160 million (27.6%).** Funds would allow IDHS to increase salaries for child care staff through its Smart Start Workforce Grants. Additionally, new funding is needed to cover costs associated with the increasing CCAP caseload.
- **Increases, at a minimum, funding for the Early Intervention (EI) program by \$40 million (25.7%).** Funds would allow IDHS to address the ongoing workforce crisis by increasing reimbursement rates for providers and salaries for service coordinators, among other needed policy improvements.
- **Increases, at a minimum, funding for evidence-based home visiting (HV) programs (Maternal and Child Home Visiting Program, Healthy Families) by \$5 million (21.8%).** Funds would allow IDHS to move wages for home visitors and supervisors closer to the state's recommended salary levels. Additionally, funds could be used to increase the number of families served.
- **Maintain funding for the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) by appropriating \$60 million in GRF.** ECACE, launched in 2021, is a robust set of supports for the early childhood workforce, including scholarships, higher education navigators, and mentors. The Pritzker administration used federal dollars to support this initiative, but these dollars are set to expire. The General Assembly should appropriate general revenue funds to IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC to continue supporting ECACE and the early childhood workforce.

Support legislation to create a new unified early childhood state agency. Families with young children and those professionals who care for them navigate a complex, fragmented, and under-resourced early care and learning system. It is why Governor Pritzker issued [Executive Order 2023-09](#), which initiates a multi-year process to create of a new unified early childhood state agency. Legislation is needed in 2024 to create the new agency, though it will not be fully functional until Fiscal Year 2027.

Support legislation to expand eligibility to the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) for child care teachers and staff who live at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (PFL). The child care workforce is dominated by women, many of whom have young children themselves. Providing child care to teachers and staff may encourage them to remain working in the field, reducing high turnover. The policy change would also act as an attractive benefit to working parents (and future parents) who do not currently work in child care.

Support legislation to create the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program. Robust paid family leave polices give parents the opportunity in the first weeks of life to focus on their role as a parent and on the well-being of their child, particularly when affordable, quality infant care is in low supply and licensed child care is not available until a baby is six weeks old. Illinois is falling behind other states in providing this life-changing benefit to families with young children.