

Early Childhood Advocacy Day (ECAD) Talking Points for Advocates



As you talk with your lawmakers about Illinois early childhood issues and needs, please feel free to use the following talking points. Focus on any of the budget requests that are most important to you! Most importantly, lead with why you came to Springfield. Why does this matter to you?

Bear in mind that your lawmaker will likely tell you that IL is in a tough budget situation – this is true, but it is our job to remind them of the importance of early childhood investments for our families and communities.

General Early Childhood Talking Points:

- Early childhood education and care is vital for Illinois! Early childhood development lays the foundation for future academic success, social skills, and emotional well-being.
- Research consistently shows that investments in early childhood education yield significant long-term benefits, including higher graduation rates, college attendance and higher lifetime earnings.
- Despite many years of support by Illinois' governors and General Assemblies, too few children can access early learning services, and the early learning workforce is too often poorly compensated for their important work and the skills and knowledge they bring to it.

2025 Early Childhood Budget Requests and Talking Points:

Early Childhood (ECACE) Scholarship (IBHE/ISAC) ↑ 15 million

- The ECACE Scholarship Program aims to address the shortage of qualified early childhood educators by helping to offset the often-unaffordable cost of higher education.
- Funding in FY25 was far below what was needed to meet program demand, leaving thousands of students who'd started coursework toward their degree or credential without the financial support needed for full completion.
- Insufficient funding for ECACE will make it harder for Illinois providers when hiring qualified teachers to open new preschool classrooms, worsening child care deserts, reducing families' access to quality early education.

Legislator Ask: Will you support restoring ECACE funds by \$15 million so that the program can continue to support nearly 2,700 early childhood educators in completing their coursework?

Early Intervention (EI) Program (IDHS) ↑ \$60 million

- Families are experiencing service delays at unprecedented levels, largely caused by provider shortages.
- A recent cost model produced by IDHS shows that the program is underfunded by nearly \$200 million and reimbursement rates must be increased by 95% to fully cover providers' costs and time.
- Additional funding is urgently needed to address service delays, by increasing provider reimbursement rates and service coordinator compensation.

Legislator Ask: Will you support a \$60m increase for EI, to ensure families and children receive the timely services to which they are legally entitled.

Child Care (IDHS) ↑ \$250 million - included in governor's proposed budget

- Too many families with young children are unable to access quality, affordable child care and those working in child care programs are wholly undercompensated.

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- Funding is needed to continue the Smart Start Workforce Grants addressing compensation and providing for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) needs, including family child care and center-based rates, maintaining caseloads this year and next and other program improvements.

Legislator Ask: Will you support Illinois families by supporting a \$170 million increase for child care?

Home Visiting (HV) Programs (IDHS) ↑ \$5 million

- Research shows that evidence-based home-visiting programs can increase positive birth outcomes for children, improve the likelihood that families have a primary care physician, and decrease rates of child abuse and neglect.
- Because funding has remained largely flat for two decades, not nearly enough families are able to access these critical services.
- Additional funding should be used to increase provider compensation, expand services, and enhance the state's infrastructure.

Legislator Ask: Will you support the Illinois early childhood communities that need the most by supporting \$5 million for Home Visiting Programs?

Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) (ISBE) ↑ \$75 million

- The administration is pausing their goal this year to eliminate preschool deserts in our state.
- In addition to the need for more preschool services, we must also address the issue that many early childhood educators remain chronically under-compensated, particularly those working in community-based settings and those serving infants and toddlers.
- In too many cases, not enough infant and toddler services are available and overall per-child funding levels lag behind in the cost of providing services AND providing competitive pay.
- Additional funding should be used to increase provider compensation, increase existing per child amounts, create new full-day slots, and expand access to infant and toddler program services.

Legislator Ask: Will you support Illinois' youngest children by supporting a \$75 million increase for the ECBG to expand preschool and infant/toddler services?

2025 Early Childhood Bill Co-sponsorship

- HB3439/SB2446 aims to address inefficiencies, enhance communication with providers, and increase transparency in licensing for child care programs:
- The bill aligns state timelines for facility licenses and background checks.
- The bill puts into law existing DCFS guidance regarding provisional hiring of program staff.
- The bill requires IDEC to create a consumer education website to post monitoring reports in plain language and serve as a central site for all licensing policies and documents
- The bill requires Illinois State Police to publish a list of acceptable governmental documentation families can use to enroll children in child care.

Legislator Ask: Will you co-sponsor* (HB3439/SB2446) to improve the process for licensing of child care programs (also called Day Care Licensing in state law and rule)?

**If your lawmaker says they will co-sponsor, please let one of the ECAD volunteers know so we can follow up!*