

Start Early's Legislative Priorities for the Spring 2026 Session:

Support HB4606 (Faver Dias, Castro) to codify in law the framework for a statewide Universal Newborn Support Systems (UNSS) program. The postpartum period is a pivotal time for newborns and parents/caregivers, yet many families struggle to navigate our complicated health care and early childhood systems. Universal Newborn Support Systems (UNSS) is a voluntary, no-cost program that would offer short-term screening, education, and referral services to every family with a newborn in Illinois.

Support HB5225 (Manley, Cappel) to authorize Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) to diagnose autism spectrum disorder. Young children are waiting up to two years for an autism evaluation because there are not enough clinicians in Illinois authorized to diagnose autism. Illinois can lead the way towards ending the autism waitlist crisis by allowing trained SLPs to diagnose autism in children under the age of 3.

Support HB4861 (Yang Rohr) to extend the timeline by which Early Intervention (EI) families may request an impartial hearing to pursue due process complaints from three months to two years. Many EI families face prolonged gaps in services, lengthy waitlists, and interruptions in care. Parents may request an impartial hearing to pursue due process complaints; however, Illinois has a three-month statute of limitations (SOL) for families seeking such hearings, the shortest timeframe in the nation.

Support HB3483 (Moeller) / SB2413 (Villivalam) to create the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program. Robust paid family leave policies 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.

Support HB5238 (Cassidy) / SB3756 (Guzman) to create the Newborn Equity Support Transfers (NEST) program. Modeled after the successful Rx Kids program in Michigan, the NEST program would provide expectant and mothers on Medicaid with a \$1,500 cash transfer in the third trimester and \$500 a month for the first 6-12 months of the baby's life.

Budget Requests:

Grow, strengthen the state's early childhood system through an FY27 budget that includes the following funding increases:

- **Increases, at a minimum, funding for the Early Intervention (EI) program by \$40 million.** Funds would allow IDEC to issue a substantial rate increase to providers, which is desperately needed to reduce historically high service delays in the program.
- **Increases, at a minimum, funding for evidence-based maternal and child home visiting programs by \$5 million.** Funds would allow IDEC to increase provider compensation to state-recommended levels while expanding services for families.
- **Increases, at a minimum, funding for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) & Smart Start Workforce Grants (SSWG) by \$130 million.** Funds would allow IDEC to manage the program's caseload, increase reimbursement rates for both home- and center-based providers, and meet the growing demand for these critical workforce compensation supports.
- **Increases funding for the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG).** Funds would allow IDEC to expand infant/toddler and full-day preschool slots and increase grants to existing programs to help cover the true cost of care.
- **Increases, at a minimum, funding for the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) by \$5 million.** Funds would allow ISAC to issue more scholarships to students interested in entering the early care and education workforce.
- **Appropriate, at a minimum, \$500,000 for the Early CHOICES initiative.** Funds would allow for the continuation of high-quality inclusive care and education for young children with disabilities and developmental delays.