

Illinois Action for Children supports the following early childhood proposals put forth by the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus.



Health and Human Services Pillar

- **Expand the Illinois Medicaid program to include coverage of doula, home visiting services.** Too many families in Illinois, particularly those of color, do not receive the types of early care and education interventions proven to support successful births and proper child development. The proposal expands the Medicaid program to include coverage for doula and evidence-based home visiting services for individuals who qualify for medical assistance. By expanding Medicaid to cover these interventions, the state can expand home visiting and doula capacity and coordinate services and supports for children and families.
- **Update the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) eligibility calculator.** The proposal adds to the calculator a question about whether the family is applying for child care assistance the first time or redetermining its eligibility. The federal government allows states to use different income eligibility levels for new and redetermining families and Illinois uses a higher “exit” income threshold. This change would help families understand eligibility more clearly.

Education Pillar

- **Extend Early Intervention (EI) services to three-year olds until their next school year begins.** This proposal would allow those children receiving Early Intervention (EI) services prior to their third birthday *and* are found eligible for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in preschool to remain in the EI program until the beginning of the school year following their third birthday. This change will minimize gaps in services, ensure better continuity of care, and align practices for enrollment of preschool children.
- **Establish in state law a kindergarten readiness assessment.** A kindergarten readiness assessment is an observational tool designed to help teachers, administrators, families, and policymakers better understand the developmental readiness of children entering kindergarten. Illinois began requiring the administration of its kindergarten readiness assessment several years ago, but unlike other state education assessments, there is no current reference to it in law. The proposal would formalize the State Board’s current policy in statute, allowing schools, districts, and the state to understand better where our young learners need support to be successful.
- **Establish the Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations Act.** The proposals establishes the new act, which encourages the state to increase the availability of Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (I/ECMHC) services through increased funding, encourages relevant state agencies to develop and promote improved materials for families and providers, and to provide more data on early childhood expulsions, among other things.
- **Require behavioral health services providers for children under 5 to use a developmentally appropriate diagnostic assessment and billing system.** Current law requires that Medicaid diagnosis codes for behavioral health services in young children must be coded by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or the International Classification of Diseases. These codes are not developmentally appropriate for young children. This proposal would require the use of DC 0-5 diagnostic codes for children under 5 and publicize the existing crosswalk to the ICD-10 codes for billing purposes.
- **Establish the Early Childhood Workforce Act.** This proposal establishes a new act, which recognizes the critical role of the early childhood workforce. It encourages IDHS to offer targeted outreach and financial support to those seeking to increase their credentials while prioritizing diversity and communities with the greatest shortages. It provides annual reports on those receiving scholarships and encourages agencies to prioritize reaching compensation parity between early childhood and its K-12 peers.
- **Establish the Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Act.** This proposal establishes a new act, which recognizes the role that high-quality early childhood experiences have on children’s short and long-term outcomes. The act also demonstrates support of the Illinois General Assembly for the goals of the Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding and encourages the state to create an implementation planning process with a designated body accountable for implementing the Commission’s recommendations.
- **Expand the Minority Teacher of Illinois Scholarship Program.** This proposal would aid in our early childhood workforce efforts – specifically efforts to advance the careers of our early childhood teachers of color and our bilingual educators. It would increase scholarship amounts for teacher candidates, which is greatly needed, and it would also provide an opportunity to target candidates earlier in the pipeline by expanding eligibility to those who have shown interest in education as early as high school.