

SMART START ILLINOIS: A Plan for Families and the Early Childhood Workforce

Smart Start Illinois aims to expand and strengthen early care and education services to ensure all expecting families, infants, toddlers and preschoolers across the state have what they need to be happy, healthy, and ready to learn. Smart Start will also bring about much-needed stability to budgets and salaries for providers and educators.

What Does Smart Start Look Like for Early Childhood in FY24?

Child Care Workforce Compensation Contracts (IDHS-DEC)

\$130 million

Providers and educators need more stability and higher wages. These nation-leading contracts would enable child care programs to:

- Increase wages, therefore supporting recruitment and retention of staff
- Bring about monthly budgetary predictability and stability
- Increase access to high-quality care for families

Early Childhood Block Grant (ISBE)

\$75 million increase (12.5%)

Families need more high-quality preschool options and a well-supported early childhood workforce.

With the additional funding, ISBE would:

- Continue increasing workforce compensation
- Provide supports for the workforce, particularly those employed by community-based organizations or working with infants and toddlers
- Create 5,000 preschool slots
- Invest in the Prevention Initiative (PI) program and additional quality investments

Home Visiting Programs (IDHS)

\$5 million increase (27.9%)

Home visiting programs increase positive birth outcomes yet funding has remained largely flat for over two decades. With additional funding, IDHS would:

- Provide home visiting services to an additional 500-650 families
- In addition, we hope the Department would increase compensation for the home visiting workforce

Early Intervention (IDHS)

\$40 million increase (34.5%)

Illinois needs to increase Early Intervention services to more young children, boost provider support and increase rates. With additional funding, IDHS would:

- Increase provider reimbursement rates by at least 10%
- Address service coordination challenges, and provide additional funding to the Department to accommodate a growing caseload

Governor Pritzker's Proposed Budget for FY24 includes other important supports for early childhood:

\$70 million increase for Child Care (IDHS) - This would increase funding to the Child Care Assistance Program, increasing access to child care for low-income families and making it possible to update the Department's data system.

\$100 million for child care facilities (CDB) - This would bring capital for childhood providers to expand existing facilities or build new facilities.