



Raising
Illinois

RAISING ILLINOIS, FY2026 PRIORITIES

This document outlines Raising Illinois' goals for FY 2026, across the coalition's four priority areas and eight interconnected strategies within the Illinois Prenatal-to-Three Agenda. As organized in this document, efforts will be advanced through budget advocacy, legislative advocacy, administrative and implementation advocacy and public awareness, engagement and mobilization.

September, 2025

PERINATAL SUPPORTS

Budget

- Preserve **existing federal funding streams** for maternal and child health, including Medicaid, Title V and the Maternal Health Innovation Program, and supplement any lost funding in the state budget wherever possible

Administration & Implementation

- Advance the **statewide recommendations for expanding Universal Newborn Support Services (UNSS)**, developed through the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems project
- Support activities identified by the Illinois Department of Public Health's **Birth Equity Blueprint**, the Health and Medicine Policy Research Group's **Birth Center Task Force Strategic Plan** and the Black Midwifery Collective's **Illinois Community-Based Birth Justice Strategic Plan** to improve positive birth outcomes
- Establish **infrastructure to support community-based providers to participate in Medicaid billing** for newly covered services provided by doulas, lactation specialists, community health workers and home visitors

Public Awareness, Engagement and Mobilization

- Inform and socialize the **maternal health landscape evaluation** conducted by the Illinois Maternal Health Innovation Program
- Continue uplifting **provider needs regarding enrollment and utilization of Medicaid billing** for doula services and lactation support services

HOME VISITING

Budget

- Build momentum to reauthorize funding in FY 2027 for the federal **Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program** and mitigate the impact of other changes to the federal budget

Administration & Implementation

- Ensure the **effective transition of home visiting program administration to the new Illinois Department of Early Childhood**, with a focus on funding alignment, data integration and support for immigrant families and other priority populations



- Assess the feasibility of a **new home visiting credential** through the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, including how to leverage the credential to improve workforce compensation and diversity

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Create and disseminate informational resources for home visitors, families and the public to **strengthen connections and referrals across PN3-serving systems**
- Publicize statewide engagement opportunities for home visitors to inform the ongoing implementation of **Medicaid coverage for home visiting services**
- Expand the Home Visiting Impact Awards, a **home visitor appreciation campaign**, to continue raising awareness and boosting staff morale

EARLY CARE & LEARNING

Budget

- Increase **state investment in core early childhood programs** currently funded through the Early Childhood Block Grant, Child Care Assistance Program and Smart Start, with particular attention to expanding the supply and quality of infant-toddler care and learning
- Preserve **existing federal funding streams** for Early Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant, and supplement any lost funding or eligibility restrictions in the state budget wherever possible

Administration & Implementation

- Prioritize the unique needs and costs associated with serving infants and toddlers in the state's **funding equity design** as part of the transition to the new Illinois Department of Early Childhood
- Continue exploring opportunities to **make Smart Start Workforce Grants more accessible** to programs serving infants and toddlers, including uplifting the recommendations collected through Raising Illinois' provider focus group
- Ensure equitable access to **funding for community-based organizations to make capital improvements** through the Early Childhood Construction Grants, with particular attention to building new infant-toddler classrooms
- Continue recruiting a **culturally representative workforce**, including utilization of the Gateways ESL & Bilingual Credential
- Expand the **online application for the Child Care Assistance Program** to all Service Delivery Areas statewide

- Implement the **child care licensing changes** directed under HB 3439

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Continue **educating state lawmakers, the private sector and the public** about the benefits and return on investment of infant-toddler care and learning
- **Uplift the perspectives of infant-toddler providers** in the state's funding equity design process through written recommendations, public comment or other messaging

EARLY INTERVENTION

Budget

- Significantly increase **state investment in Early Intervention**, in line with the findings of the statewide cost model report, to substantially raise rates for providers and more effectively serve families

Legislation

- Amend the **state dispute resolution procedures** for EI to more closely align with the comparable procedures for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Administration & Implementation

- Adopt the proposed administrative rulemaking to **change the EI sliding fee schedule** so that families would **pay no fees if their household income falls below 319%**, rather than 186%, of the Federal Poverty Level
- Adopt the proposed administrative rulemaking to **change the definition of an eligible child to include a subject of a substantiated case of abuse or neglect**, in line with Pub. Act 102-926 (originally HB 4242)
- Reduce service delays by **modifying and expanding models of service delivery**, with a focus on addressing disparities in race and geography, as well as for families with complex needs

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Continue mobilizing families, providers and other stakeholders to advocate for **increased state investment in EI** through lawmaker outreach, petitions, media coverage and other activities
- Improve **public awareness of families' procedural rights** regarding EI services and support parents in **filing state complaints** after a violation of EI timelines



ECONOMIC SECURITY

Budget

- Increase state funding beyond \$1M in FY 2026 for the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to **expand the Diaper Distribution Pilot Program or another diaper benefit** to serve more communities
- Preserve **existing federal funding streams** for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other safety net programs, and supplement any lost funding in the state budget wherever possible

Legislation

- Establish a **statewide paid family and medical leave insurance program**, with substantial protections for low-wage workers and sufficient time off for new parents and infants to bond
- Establish a **state-level guaranteed income fund, similar unconditional cash assistance program or a task force** to inform the development of such a model for ensuring families with young children can meet their material needs

Administration & Implementation

- Ensure ongoing use of the **Internal Revenue Service's Direct File program with state filing integration** so working families can file both their federal and state taxes more easily and at no cost
- Establish **coordination and alignment provisions in the next Medicaid Managed Care contracts and Section 1115 waiver implementation to improve WIC and SNAP referrals, certification and participation**
- Increase **WIC outreach and referrals for families enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start programs**, through the ongoing multi-year collaboration between IDHS and the Illinois Head Start Association
- **Reduce Illinois' SNAP payment error rate** by streamlining administrative processes to mitigate the impact of recent federal budget reconciliation policy changes

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Mobilize families, employers and other stakeholders to advocate for **paid family and medical leave** through lawmaker outreach, storytelling and other activities
- Continue informing working parents of the **paid time off protections available** across the City of Chicago, Cook County and the rest of the state
- Increase the **WIC coverage rate**, particularly for children ages 1-3, through ongoing **public awareness, outreach and mobile enrollment activities** both in the City of Chicago and statewide

CROSS-SYSTEM WORKFORCE

Budget

- Sustain and increase state funding for **early childhood pipeline and pathways programs**, including the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity, Early Childhood Apprenticeship and Human Services Professional Loan Repayment Program
- Preserve **existing federal funding streams** for higher education scholarships and loan forgiveness programs, and supplement any lost funding in the state budget wherever possible

Administration & Implementation

- Continue informing the **transition and redesign process for the Illinois Department of Early Childhood**, with particular focus on PN3 workforce needs, cross-training, mental health consultation and data integration
- Connect providers to **cross-training offerings** that meet professional development requirements across early childhood provider types

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Continue **building awareness and mobilizing support for state-funded pipeline and pathways programs** for the PN3 workforce
- Support new and ongoing efforts to **recruit prospective PN3 providers and retain incumbent workers**, both locally and statewide



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