



May 28, 2025

We, the Village Public Comments on Funding Redesign

For May 28, 2025 Funding Design Workgroup Meeting

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment. My name is Bri Stormer and I am a co-chair of the Policy Committee of the We the Village coalition – a group of providers, families, advocates, and community members fighting for robust, equitable, stable, and transparent resources for the early childhood sector. One of the original goals of We, the Village was to advocate for the implementation of the Illinois Early Childhood Funding Commission's Recommendations, and we are thrilled that the transition to the Illinois Department of Early Childhood is creating space for a bold and transformational approach to early childhood funding.

As members of We, the Village Policy Committee have been attending these meetings regularly, we have heard discussion around the viability of creating a funding formula in early childhood. We want to articulate our deep appreciation for this analysis and the subsequent exploratory conversations. While your team is still in the fact-finding process, we would like to offer some ideas for consideration on substance and process.

- First – WTV Policy has been actively engaged in continuous quality improvement within formula grant-based funding mechanisms including that of the Smart Start Workforce Grants and the Smart Start Quality Support Program. In accordance with the coalition's work to date, we would ask the new agency to consider two ideas. One, we believe that the state has been highly successful in the creation and growth of the formula grant-based mechanism of funding. We have seen this demonstrated with the COVID-era relief grants and now with the successful completion of the first year of the Smart Start Workforce Grants and ongoing work within the Quality Support Program. Not only do we see extremely high uptake rates for the Workforce Grants – from 75% to 90% - but we also see the direct and immediate impact the grants are having on educators with the \$2-\$3 per hour wage increase. We would encourage the new agency to continue to implement flexible and predictable funding mechanisms that allow for long-term program sustainability across settings.

- In addition, WTV policy has been closely tracking the State's adherence to the federal guidance changes within CCDF. While the state has a 2-year waiver to complete cost analyses and take appropriate steps, WTV would encourage the state to consider existing requirements and recommendations for continuous quality improvement for CCAP administration in its future thinking.
- Next, we would like to offer some recommendations on process. We have appreciated the state's efforts to cost model either different current program models or true cost of care models. We recognize this is time-intensive work but absolutely necessary to understand different cost drivers. Just as was done in the Smart Start Child Care Ad Hoc this past year with the Smart Start Workforce Grants, we would advocate for increased transparency on the state's cost modeling efforts. This would allow us as advocates and providers to wrestle with the same variables that you are seeing and help us to better understand the opportunities and potential limitations of different strategies.
- The last idea we would offer on process is on more robust transparent engagement with the field. These are extremely difficult decisions you are grappling with and WTV would love to offer up the coalition as thought partners. We believe that wider and deeper engagement with providers and families will help the Department move from broad strategies into practical solutions and give the field time to prepare, mitigating some of the unintended consequences that are likely to arise from any major changes in funding administration.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our comments. We look forward to continued partnership with the administration and to continuing to co-construct a redesigned and transformative early childhood funding system.

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We, the Village Coalition is a group of advocates, non-profit organizations, child care providers, school districts, parents and others who have come together to fight for the well-being of Illinois' youngest children. We seek adequate, equitable, sustainable, reliable funding for children's services from birth through age five. We want to ensure all children can access quality education and care, as their parents choose. We want resources to be invested in the children and communities that need it most, in order to eliminate racial, socio-economic, and other disparities. We are working together to make sure that ALL families and early childhood providers have the resources they need to help children succeed.