



ILLINOIS

## **Public Comments from Brig. Gen. Stephen Curda**

Retired, U.S. Army

*For the Early Childhood Funding Commission*

*October 13, 2020*

- Good afternoon, Commission members. Thank you for your efforts at strengthening supports for Illinois youngest residents by working toward smart recommendations for improvements in early childhood education, care, and other related services.
- I'm Stephen Curda, a retired U.S. Army General, the Executive Director of Illinois Joining Forces, and a professor at National Louis University.
- I'm also a member of the national, nonpartisan, non-profit organization called Mission: Readiness, with over 750 retired admirals and generals nationwide.
- Mission: Readiness members are concerned that too many young people wouldn't have the chance to join the military even if they wanted to. In Illinois, 70% of young people aged 17-24 *cannot* qualify for service because of some combination of these disqualifying factors: they are overweight, too poorly educated, or have a criminal record.
- Fortunately, the research shows that investing in children's earliest development can help solve this problem.
- High-quality early childhood supports are crucial for helping kids enter kindergarten ready to learn and setting them on a path to success — toward whatever civilian career, college, or military experience they may ultimately choose.
- When kids have access to early life supports, they are more likely to develop the strong minds and characters that are crucial for success in life. They are also more likely to start healthy, developmentally appropriate nutrition and physical activity habits early on.
- We strongly support the work of the Commission to address systemic, long-standing challenges, and look forward to your proposals for improving upon kids' earliest life experiences. Doing so will help prepare them for bright futures, no matter what life path they may choose.
- Thank you for this critical work, and for your time today.