

Dear IL Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education & Care Funding:

POWER-PAC IL (Parents Organized to Win, Educate, and Renew - Policy Action Council) is a coalition of low-income Latina and African-American parent leaders, primarily mothers and grandmothers, from throughout the state of Illinois. Our members were excited when Governor Pritzker charged each of you to ensure "Illinois will become the best state in the nation for families raising young children." After reading the report that resulted from a year long process of meetings and feedback, we are happy with the direction the Commission is taking.

We are excited that you have recommended a drastic increase in ECEC funding, showing your commitment to comprehensively tackle gaps in early childhood. We advocate for increases in early childhood funding every year, but they are never enough and a larger investment would allow the State to have the funds to truly serve our families, particularly those who need it the most.

Additionally, in recommending a centralized ECEC funding system, you would provide stability for programs, agencies and providers and therefore provide stability for parents.

We enthusiastically support the recommendation to create a singular agency that would centralize all ECEC systems. From the beginning of POWER-PAC IL's Early Learning campaign in 2008, we have stated that the early learning system of enrollment is a "maze", confusing, and frustrating making parents feel disconnected from the process and, in many cases, making them give up altogether. It is our hope that this work will lead to the creation of a new agency of Early Childhood. The creation of an **entirely new agency** (which we hope to be the end result) would streamline our complicated ECEC systems and ease the process for families in an equitable manner.

Yet, we must also say that your recommendations for further research on Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education can NOT be an empty promise. For Early Intervention, exploring ways that providers can both receive the support and guidance they need while also providing accountability will be necessary to ensure that ALL families - particularly African-American and Latino families who have previously not been served because of their zip code - get the services they need and deserve for their children to thrive. At the same time, logistical barriers for families regarding EC Special Education outside of school settings are very real and need to be addressed, again, to ensure all families receive the services they need.

In creating a new agency for early learning, we must ensure greater funding that will create equitable access to Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education. In order to do this, we also believe that Early Childhood Special Education must be included in the capacities of this new agency, along with following through on your recommendations for further research. Additionally, not just Early Intervention, but all 0-3 programs, the disparity in funding between programs for 3- & 4-year-olds and for those under 3 years is an injustice that overlooks the importance of a child's first years and that must be addressed. We urge you to increase funding for programs for families with 0-3 year olds to address this historical gap.

In conclusion, we are glad to hear of the vision that you have all laid out. We only hope that together, parents, providers, commissioners, and all, can ensure that this vision expands to properly include both Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education and can one day become a reality. We look forward to continuing to be a part of the process and providing input in the next phase of the Commission's work.