

**Transition Advisory Committee  
Meeting 4  
March 14, 2024, 5:30-7:00pm CT  
Public attendee link:**

[https://aftonpartners.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_MuYd2jo6ScaNy\\_X1uo5iZg](https://aftonpartners.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_MuYd2jo6ScaNy_X1uo5iZg)

**Passcode:**  
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**In attendance:**

**Transition Advisory Committee (TAC) members:** Makisha Binns (Kiddos Care), Katie Cobb (Peoria Public Schools), Johnna Darragh-Ernst (Heartland Community College), Tonya Frehner (Birth to Five Illinois), Rochelle Golliday (Cuddle Care, Inc), Keshia Harris (Parent, We, the Village Coalition), LaKeesha James-Smith (Parent, Family Advisory Council), Janice Moenster (Brightpoint), Bela Moté – Chair (Carole Robertson Center), Dara Munson (Family Focus), Mariana Osoria (Chicago of Chicago), Angel Powell-Muldrow (Early Childhood Center Principal), Edgar Ramirez (Chicago Commons), Robin Steans (Advance Illinois), Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro (Latino Policy Forum), Sarah Ziembra (Shine Therapy Service)

**State Agency Members and Consultants:** Erin Arango-Escalante (All Children Thrive), Megan Bock (Afton Partners), Beza Bulega (Afton Partners), Aressa Coley (Afton Partners), Kristen Garcia (Afton Partners), Liz Garza (Afton Partners), Marissa Ortiz (Afton Partners), Katie Reed (Afton Partners), Siri Smillie (Afton Partners), Ann Whalen (Early Childhood Transition Director)

**Members of the public:** 27

**Minutes**

**1. Welcome and introductions – Ann Whalen (10 minutes)**

Ann Whalen (Early Childhood Transition Director) initiated the meeting with a brief welcome to the TAC and public participants, outlining virtual meeting protocols and reminding members that meeting minutes and materials will be available on the GOECD website in English and Spanish. She encouraged feedback through a reflection form. Ann then shared the meeting agenda and goals, which include fostering community among TAC members, advocating for Department of Early Childhood Legislation, advancing equity through a 2Gen Approach, and applying a family-centered lens to define racial equity in line with the TAC's objectives.

**2. Department of Early Childhood Legislation Update –Ann Whalen (15 minutes)**

Ann provided an update on the Department of Early Childhood Legislation, highlighting the multi-year transition timeline with three phases. The new agency is set to be operational on July 1, 2026, with a two-year focus on start-up, redesign, and preparation. Phase 2, Redesign & Engagement, involves establishing new workgroups from the ChiByDesign parent co-design workshop findings. She also shared that tracking legislation for agency authorization is crucial for this phase. The TAC will interpret parent workshop findings collectively to form recommendations for additional workgroups. Volunteers are sought to plan and establish these workgroups, which will propose support and service redesign ideas

within the ECE ecosystem, requiring legislative approval. The final transition report from Phase 2 will outline workgroup findings, priorities, accomplishments, and next steps.

Robin Steans (TAC member) inquired about the timeline for initiating workgroups. Ann stated that three workgroups—early childhood special education (ECSE), data and learning infrastructure, and multilingual family support—are currently in development for TAC members' involvement. Ann anticipates additional workgroups emerging from co-design workshop recommendations, emphasizing the importance of listening to provider and family input. Ann then provided an overview of the complex early childhood system, highlighting the need for a more streamlined structure to promote equity and access. She outlined which ECE services will transfer to the new agency in July 2026, including programs from IDHS (CCAP, Migrant & Seasonal Head Start, etc.), ISBE (Early Childhood Block Grant, etc.), and DCFS (Child Care Licensing), while broader family and school support services will remain with home agencies.

Ann then gave an overview of what the legislation for the bill that proposes the establishment of the Department of Early Childhood, SB1 and HB5451, does and does not do. The legislation does:

- Propose the establishment of the new Department of Early Childhood on July 1, 2024
- Propose to move the early childhood programs and services from legacy agencies (IDHS, ISBE, DCFS) to the Department of Early Childhood on July 1, 2026
- Propose to add the Department of Early Childhood to applicable State advisory councils
- Requires the new Department of Early Childhood to designate a body by July 1, 2026 to advise the Department on an ongoing basis
- Propose to add the Department of Early Childhood to applicable Illinois codes (e.g., Civil Administrative Code of Illinois)

The legislation does not:

- Propose any policy changes to existing programs or services
- Propose any implementation changes to existing programs or services, other than to move them to the new agency in 2026
- Make any substantive adjustments to advisory groups or committees such as the Early Learning Council and Illinois Interagency Council on Early Intervention

Ann provided an overview of the legislative process, which involves the bill being introduced in the 1st Chamber's Committee (e.g., Senate Executive Committee), followed by Floor Debate and Vote in the 1st Chamber. Then, it moves to the Committee in the 2nd Chamber (e.g., House), and subsequent Floor Debate and Vote. If amended in the 2nd Chamber, it requires another vote in the 1st Chamber. Once passed in both Chambers, the Governor signs it into law. The bill was introduced and assigned to the Senate Executive Committee on 3/13 at 2pm. Ann shared the Committee members' list and ways for TAC and the public to engage: via social media, contacting Committee members, filing witness slips on [ilga.gov](http://ilga.gov), providing testimonies in committees, and writing op-eds or Letters to the Editor. Personal State Senators or Representatives' contact information can be found on the Illinois State Board of Elections' website using a work or home address. =

Rochelle Golliday (TAC member) shared that advocacy groups such as Cuddle Care, Inc and Illinois Action for Children send emails out with direct links and instructions to file a witness slip, and that they keep parents and staff abreast through snail mail, emails, text messages, and posters to encourage them to fill out witness slips.

Ann then reviewed the FY25 budget request for the Department of Early Childhood. The request for FY25 is \$13 million lump sum and the projected cost factors include:

- Staffing 30 FTE, plus social security and operations costs (e.g., facilities, computers)
- Analysis of current processes and workflows in existing agencies
- Support for ongoing engagement of parents, providers, and other stakeholders in the design of a new system
- Evaluation, planning, and feasibility studies for the data and learning infrastructure needed for an efficient and equitable operation of programs and services
- Financial planning and modeling to support the analysis of how to braid and blend multiple funding streams and disbursement mechanisms in a way that is efficient, equitable, and less bureaucratic for providers and parents to navigate
- Training and support for the New Agency Team

They estimate that a fully staffed agency for FY27 has between 250-400 FTE.

Ann asked the group if they had any questions, and Janice Moenster (TAC member) asked if she's heard from anyone who's opposing the concept or idea. Ann said no, but she has been asked questions about the timeline and why two years is needed. She has also been asked questions about the procurement process, but no one has been strongly opposed to the idea.

### 3. **Small Group Discussions: Championing the Legislation** – Aressa Coley (20 minutes)

Ann turned it over to Aressa to facilitate a small group discussion to brainstorm ways to champion the legislation. The group broke out into small groups and answered the following questions:

- What information about the Department of Early Childhood would help you be an effective champion?
- What outreach strategies could help generate public momentum for the legislation?
- Share examples of how you plan to take action

After 7 minutes, the TAC regrouped and shared highlights from their discussions.

Kesha Harris (TAC member) emphasized the importance of utilizing social media to get the word out because parents and stakeholders are on social media so that is something that can be leveraged.

Group 1 members discussed the role of TAC members in sharing information about TAC activities and legislation, focusing on distinguishing between information sharing and specific advocacy actions. They expressed enthusiasm for being information sources about ongoing developments and active organizations.

Group 2 members found the one-pager helpful and widely distributed it among staff and community partners. They suggested translating it into Spanish and other languages, adding more student perspectives, providing adequate notice for time-sensitive tasks, and centralizing access to materials on a landing page. They also emphasized the importance of key messages for addressing concerns of legislative opponents.

Group 3 members appreciated understanding the timeline and high-level expectations, anticipating more detailed information later. Their outreach strategies prioritize family engagement and social media utilization for consistent messaging. They emphasized the value of radical inclusion of parents in information sharing.

Group 4 members shared that they had received inquiries about the structure and location of the new agency, and also favorably noting funding graphics and social media leverage. They suggested illustrating how the new department collaborates with existing agencies, contrasting it with current siloed approaches, and clarifying the impact on parents and on-the-ground operations. They proposed a broad email campaign with clear action steps for families and providers.

#### **4. Reflections from Feb 27 Defining Equity Breakouts – Aressa Coley, Bela Moté (10 minutes)**

Aressa led a reflection on equity definitions from the previous meeting, emphasizing the need for accountability and equity checks throughout the process. There was a consensus on the importance of engaging voices beyond immediate networks, being inclusive, and considering those furthest from opportunity. Specificity when discussing race or other populations, as well as disaggregating data, were highlighted.

Bela Moté, TAC Chair, announced the completion of a key action item from the last meeting: the launch of the Racial Equity Workgroup. Members include Johnna, Tonya, LaKeesha, Marcy, and Mariana. The workgroup aims to ground the TAC in a racial equity definition by reviewing resources and recommendations, incorporating TAC feedback, and proposing a definition for discussion at the April TAC meeting.

#### **5. Defining Equity: Using a 2Gen Approach to Center Families – Erin Arango-Escalante (31 minutes)**

Erin Arango-Escalante (TAC Consultant, All Children Thrive) led a discussion on the two-generation (2Gen) approach, emphasizing its focus on building family well-being by working with both children and adults together. This aligns with the TAC's goal of understanding stakeholder input and prioritizing family goals and needs. The 2Gen approach underscores the importance of centering families and equity, accommodating diverse family structures to support all members. Erin highlighted the guiding principle of listening to family voices and recommendations, prompting discussion on how family input is currently integrated into the state's early childhood system.

Sarah Ziemba, a TAC member and Early Intervention provider, highlighted recent efforts by providers to organize and advocate for inclusion of their voices, which were previously overlooked.

Rochelle noted the increasing presence of advisory boards in agencies, facilitating representation and advocacy for groups.

Rebecca Vanderluck-Navarro, another TAC member, suggested engaging families through ESL classes as a gateway to early childhood services and learning from the myriad of services offered by participants.

Erin posed questions about the ECE system's feedback process and its communication with parents.

Tonya Frehner (TAC member) discussed Birth to Five Illinois's family councils, which provide diverse representation and a platform for parents to share experiences and insights into community needs.

Janice emphasized Brightpoint's prioritization of program participant voice, informing parents about policies, appealing processes, and their rights within the welfare system to build trust.

The group then split into smaller discussions to address barriers to incorporating family voices in the new agency and strategize collaborative approaches with partners. Aressa encouraged TAC members to look through the [Jamboard](#) and look through everyone's responses.

#### 6. **Next Steps and Adjourn** – Bela Moté (4 minutes)

In the meeting's closing, Bela asked for volunteers to represent the TAC on newly formed Transition workgroups: Early Childhood Special Education, Multilingual Families, and Data & Learning. She announced that the next meeting will focus on reviewing and providing feedback on the proposed definition from the Racial Equity workgroup, developing goals and guiding principles to support equity and family experiences, and receiving updates on transition workgroups. A follow-up email with a meeting summary will be sent next week. The next listening session is on March 15, 2024, from 12 to 1pm, and the next TAC meeting is on April 16, 2024, from 5:30 to 7pm.

#### **Next meeting:**

Tuesday, April 16, 2024

5:30-7pm CT