

Protect Prevention Programs in the State Budget
Conference Call Summary
Voices for Illinois Children
May 4, 2009, 1:30 p.m.

Children's Mental Health Programs

Dawn Melchiorre, Senior Policy Associate, Voices for Illinois Children
T: 312-516-5557, E: dmelchiorre@voices4kids.org

About the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership

Children's academic success and overall wellness cannot be ensured without addressing their mental health needs. Research indicates that children's social and emotional well-being is as important as their physical and cognitive health. This work has its roots in the 2003 passage of the Children's Mental Health Act, which led to the creation of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership (ICMHP). The Partnership is a statewide group of agencies, organizations and individuals committed to improving the scope and quality of mental health programs, services and supports for Illinois children and their families. Working together, Partnership members developed a strategic plan for building a comprehensive mental health system, and identified several key priorities most in need of investment.

The investment of \$2.9 million in the ICMHP priorities with the Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health budget in FY 2009 is improving the social and emotional well-being of children. These investments include:

- Expanding children's mental health services for youth who have experienced trauma (e.g. violence, abuse)
- Providing early intervention services to children and adolescents who might not meet the criteria for a formal mental health diagnosis, but who still require services to help prevent more serious problems in the future
- Providing psychiatric services to children and youth in areas of the state where communities do not have access to a board-certified child psychiatrist, through the Telepsychiatry Pilot Project
- Providing social/emotional support services for 16- to 18-year-old youths transitioning from or between public systems such as juvenile justice or into the adult mental health system

Through these and many other efforts, Illinois has been able to serve more children at younger ages and earlier stages of need with more effective mental health supports. Our state has reduced fragmentation of services and enhanced interagency collaborations. And the Partnership's work has helped the state avoid approximately \$19 million a year in costs of unnecessary psychiatric hospitalizations and related expenses.

The Governor's proposed budget includes an almost \$350,000 cut or 12 percent of the \$3 million DHS funding for the IMCHP priorities that are improving children's social and emotional wellbeing .

After-school Programs

Wendy Chill, Director of Advocacy and Communications, Illinois Center for Violence Prevention

T: 312-986-9200, ext. 229, E: wchill@icvp.org

- \$9.7 million eliminated from the After-school, Student Support and Mentoring line item in the State Board of Education budget
- \$2.5 million reduction in Teen REACH funding, bringing the funding level to \$16.2 million. The lowest ever funding level for Teen REACH.
- \$500,000 eliminated from the State Board of Education proposed budget for After School Matters
- A total of \$12.7 million in after-school funding cut from the Governor's proposed FY2010 budget.
- The proposed FY 2010 budget includes enormous reductions in funding for after-school programs in Illinois.
- Elimination of this funding will result in thousands of children in Illinois with no place to go after school.
- Additional impact of the cuts: a loss of jobs to after-school providers if programs need to shut down; a reduction in services provided to children; increased parent fees for programming.
- The Governor's proposed FY2010 budget negatively impacts the children and working families of Illinois by eliminating significant amounts of funding for after-school programs.
- The unmet need for after-school programming is demonstrated year after year by General Assembly members' attempts to garner resources for local programs.
- Statewide demand for quality after school opportunities far outpaces the current supply with shortfall estimates between 60 and 70 percent.
- Illinois needs to be accountable to the thousands of children and families who rely on after-school programs to keep kids safe, support working families, have fun, and foster learning opportunities.

Youth to Adulthood Partnership

Anne Studzinski, Managing Director, Illinois Childhood Trauma Coalition

T: 312-516-5560; E: astudzinski@voices4kids.org

HB 4054, Foster Youth Successful Transition to Adulthood:

- Each year older wards of DCFS (aged 18-21) have their cases closed before they “age out” of the system.
- This tends to happen more downstate than in Cook County and can be the result of young people who are non-compliant with their service plan or who simply ask the court to end their wardship.
- Often times, they learn that they cannot manage on their own – usually a few months later – but under current law, they cannot come back to DCFS for help.
- HB 4054 would allow former wards under the age of 21 to come back to DCFS for the same kinds of transitional living services that they would have received had they remained wards of DCFS. They would NOT be required to return to court to have their cases re-opened or managed by DCFS.
- The Youth to Adulthood Partnership (YTAP) group feels that if these young people can receive these kinds of services and assistance, they will be less likely to need other forms of public assistance and be less likely to turn to crime to support themselves.
- HB 4054 has a delayed effective date to allow DCFS to expand and revise the programming these young people will need.

Homeless Children and Youth

Daria Mueller, Senior Policy Analyst, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
T: 312-435-4548, ext. 241, E: daria@chicagohomeless.org

The proposed budget drastically cuts housing and educational services to homeless children and youth (IDHS and ISBE line items).

Homeless Youth Services

The IDHS budget includes a 15.5 percent cut to an already underfunded Homeless Youth Services line item in the Division of Community Health and Prevention. This amounts to a \$723,000 decrease in funding. This line item has not been this low since before 1998, and if we adjust for inflation, this decrease sets us back even further. (The cut includes about 3 percent held back in reserves, and 2 percent that was cut from FY 2009 then restored last fall by the General Assembly, but is not being appropriated back until FY 2010.)

There are 24,968 unaccompanied homeless youth in Illinois over the course of a year. These youth are between the ages of 14 to 22 who lack a safe, stable private living arrangement, are not wards of the state, and are not accompanied by a parent or guardian.

They are in shelters, “couch surfing” or doubled up with other family members, friends and acquaintances on a very temporary basis, sleeping in parks, abandoned buildings, or on public transportation.

There are a variety of reasons a youth may end up homeless without a parent or guardian, most often stemming from a pattern of family conflict or abuse. Some examples include:

- Running away due to physical, sexual and emotional abuse, domestic violence, or a parent's substance abuse at home.
- Kicked out of the home due to conflicts over a youth's sexual orientation or transgender status, or because of pregnancy or parenting status.
- Foster care placements that are abusive/unsupportive, or adoptions and subsidized guardianships that leave a youth on her/his own at age 18.
- Family homelessness leads to the separation of older children from the family unit in order to stay sheltered.
- A parental figure's death or absence leaves a youth with nobody to take them in.

There are currently only 318 state-funded beds for homeless youth in Illinois.

More than half of youth requesting services are turned away due to lack of resources. State-funded Homeless Youth Programs provide emergency shelter to homeless minors and transitional housing for up to two years for youth ages 18 to 22. They provide case management and referrals, counseling, employment assistance, outreach to homeless youth in the community, support with achieving educational or vocational goals, housing assistance and aftercare. These programs are effective—87 percent of the youth served in FY 2007 successfully transitioned into safe, stable housing in the community.

The cost of providing homeless youth services—on average under \$5,000 per youth—prevents the state from paying much more to other systems:

- Juvenile Justice \$70,827/year
- Adult Corrections \$21,622/year
- Health Care \$1201/day in hospital
- Mental Health \$437/day inpatient care

Homeless youth programs also prevent victimization, suicide, unplanned pregnancies, chronic homelessness, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS and other STDs and increase high school graduation rates, employment earnings and retention, and worker productivity.

The numbers are growing, and this is the worst time to cut services to the most vulnerable. One homeless youth program in Chicago documented 326 requests from homeless young moms in 2007, 642 in 2008, and already 218 in the first quarter of 2009. This would mean almost three times the number of homeless young moms in 2009 compared to 2007.

Homeless Educational Services

The \$3 million Homeless Educational Services line item was slashed from the ISBE budget. This landmark program, enacted last year, was the first state-funded homeless education program in the nation. The State Board of Education just awarded grants under this program in February 2009 to school districts statewide. These school districts have committed to launching new strategies to ensure success in school for homeless children. Those programs will have to end after three months, if the state eliminates this program.

The federal McKinney-Vento Act provides \$3 million for homeless educational services, but this funding has been insufficient.

- The Illinois State Board of Education estimated (before the current economic downturn) that 60,000 school-age children are homeless in Illinois. However, only 26,238 students were identified and served by school districts statewide in 2008.
- Statewide, the number of homeless students in schools increased by 17.5 percent in 2008.
- This year the Chicago Public Schools have already identified 11,143 students, an 18.3 percent increase, far surpassing the total number of students served last year.
- More than 90 percent of the out-of-school youth interviewed by UIC's Survey Research Laboratory in 2005 expressed a desire to return to school.
- Illinois is the sixth highest state in the nation for home foreclosure! From January 08 to January 09, foreclosures increased 85 percent.

The elimination of the Homeless Educational Services is a bad move in these hard economic times. Through the program, ISBE awards competitive grants to assist school districts throughout the State in facilitating the enrollment, attendance, and success of the growing number of homeless children and youth. Every one of the 893 Illinois school district is eligible to apply. This grant program addresses a number of issues that affect a homeless student's ability to achieve educational success. The funds are used to:

- Secure stability in school by providing transportation services for homeless students and families. Children can lose 4-6 months of academic time with each school change.
- Ensure every school district in Illinois has a well-trained homeless liaison to identify, enroll, and serve homeless children and youth.
- Fund services and tutoring programs for homeless students.

Homeless children and youth need stability. If they can't get that in school, and they can't access basic support and housing to stay safe, this equates to a violation of human rights, and we cannot stand for it.

HB 2383: Illinois TANF Legislation

Margaret Stapleton, Senior Attorney, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
T: 312-263-3830, ext. 234, E: mstapleton@povertylaw.org

The Illinois Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cash assistance program has not been serving Illinois low income families well.

- Benefits are too low.
- Applying is difficult and IDHS workers discourage people from applying—hence the huge numbers of families with children who are on Medicaid and on Food Stamps, but get no TANF cash.
- The word on the street is that there is no cash assistance or that it is not for people who are not working.
- Program requirements are harsh and difficult to meet.

And that's the program as it was before the recession and families lost jobs and income.

- The TANF cash assistance program has not responded to the worsening economic situation in Illinois. Over the past year, the unemployment rate has increased by 54 percent (rising from 5.9 percent to 9.1 percent) and unemployment insurance claims by 58 percent, but enrollment in TANF has decreased. Less than one in five Illinois children living in deep poverty (below 50 percent FPL) receives benefits.
- Sixty-three percent of workers who lose their jobs don't qualify for unemployment insurance because they worked part-time, hadn't held their jobs long enough, or for other technical reasons. TANF is supposed to be their family's safety net.
- Families that rely on child support are also losing income—when the parent who has been paying support becomes unemployed, support payments often stop.

HB 2383 proposes changes in the TANF program that will provide working families with the temporary support they need in tough economic times while preserving TANF's foundation as a temporary and work-focused program.

Under President Obama's economic recovery plan, states whose TANF caseloads rise receive an 80 percent federal match for all increases in assistance costs. Every \$1 Illinois invests in meeting this rising need leverages \$4 in federal funds.

What HB 2383 does:

1. Improves access by stressing that TANF's purpose is to target assistance to families in need and that caseloads may increase during times of severe economic downturn. Work requirements and time limits remain as core elements of the program.
2. Makes all families living in "deep poverty" (below 50 percent FPL, \$9156/year for family of three) financially eligible for TANF.
3. Continues to encourage families to seek and retain employment by allowing them to continue receiving limited assistance until their earnings have lifted them out of poverty (above the federal poverty level).
4. Provides that applicants will receive timely assistance needed to stabilize their lives and promptly undergo a thorough assessment to guide their assignment to work activities.
5. Protects victims of violence by expanding crisis assistance and extending protection to victims of sexual violence.

Bill Status as of May 1, 2009—The bill passed the Illinois House of Representatives by a vote of 68 to 38 on March 27. It passed the Senate Human services Committee on April 29 by a vote of 5-2-2. The Senate will vote on the bill in May.

We are hoping that people across Illinois will contact their State Senator and ask him or her to vote in favor of HB 2383 because:

- Changes to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program made by HB 2383 are needed to tailor the TANF program to meet the needs of Illinois families in these recessionary times and

- Under the federal economic recovery plan 80 cents of every \$1 Illinois spends on increased TANF assistance costs will be funded by the federal government.