

Increase Home-Visiting Efforts for Young Children

'Parent-coaching' helps prepare at-risk infants, toddlers for school success

Co-sponsor **SB2235** (Collins-Millner-Delgado-Althoff-Stears) &
HB5570 (Verschoore-Feigenholtz-Ford-Hernandez-Graham)

The Solution: Provide a **\$10 million increase** in FY09 for home-visitation programs such as Healthy Families Illinois, Parents Too Soon, and other home-based, research-based, parent-coaching models. With increased funding, as many as 3,000 more children could be served through expanded and new programs statewide.

The Challenge:

- Eighty-five percent of a child's brain development occurs in the first three years of life. Evidence of the achievement gap between different children can be seen as early as 18 months. While quality preschool is a critical piece of helping all children enter school ready to succeed, more is needed to avoid early school difficulties.
- There are about 180,000 children born each year in Illinois, with at least 20 percent (36,000) born at-risk of school failure because of poverty; mothers who are teen parents or suffering from maternal depression; or language barriers. As a result, in any given year, about 108,000 infants and toddlers are at-risk of poor development and school failure.
- Unfortunately, current DHS funding for home-visiting (\$20 million) only allows Illinois to serve an estimated 6,865 – or less than 7 percent – of these at-risk children.

Background: Parents are a child's first and most important teachers. Home-visiting by trained professionals offers parents a personalized approach to enhancing children's readiness to learn in the ways that matter for later school success. In-home "parent coaches" work with families on a voluntary basis - starting in pregnancy and during the first three years of a child's life - to promote early learning, support healthy development, and prevent child abuse. Specific benefits include:

Promotes early learning and prepares children for school

- Children show improved literacy, language, problem solving, social awareness and competence, and basic skills.

Improves health outcomes for children and families –

- Families are more likely to have health insurance and a "medical home," seek well-child care, and have their children immunized.
- Families experience a substantial reduction in child maltreatment. Maintaining the existing child protective system in Illinois alone costs the federal and state governments combined over \$1.2 billion a year.
- Mothers experience reductions in preterm births and higher rates of breastfeeding and babies have higher birth weights. In the U.S., premature birth is the leading cause of neonatal mortality (death in the first month of life), and accounts for 35 percent of all health care spending on infants.

Lasting impact on children and families –

- Participation in home-visiting is associated with higher rates of high school graduation.
- Families rely less on public assistance and have healthier intervals between pregnancies, fewer problems with substance use, and less criminal-justice involvement.

Good returns on investment

- Research shows that early childhood programs save \$7 for every \$1 spent. In Illinois, for every \$1 spent on prevention programs, like home-visiting, the state has spent \$13 on corrections, special education, and child protection.

For more information, contact:

Bridget Schank,
**Ounce of
Prevention Fund**
(312) 730-2539

Dawn Melchiorre,
Voices for Illinois Children
(773) 960-4551

Tim Carpenter,
**Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
Illinois**
(312) 339-0583

Sessy Nyman,
Action for Children
(773) 315-1309