Invest in our future: Illinois Needs Economically Secure, Healthy, and Educated Children & Families

Family Economic Security

In 2012 the child poverty rate in Illinois was 21%, compared with 16% in 2005. The number of Illinois children living in areas of concentrated poverty (areas with poverty rates of 20% or more) has increased 32% since 2000.

In 2012, 29% of Illinois children lived with parents who lacked secure employment of at least 35 hours a week, 50 weeks per year.

Nearly one in five Illinois children, about 360,000, have at least one parent who works for minimum wage. At the current state minimum wage of $8.25, a minimum wage worker working 40 hours a week earns just $17,160 a year. That’s more than $2,600 below the federal poverty level for a family of three.

Health-related disparities between low-income and higher-income families

Conditions in our communities, like availability of recreational facilities, parks and bike paths, shape our ability to engage in physical activity. The lack of proximity to recreation opportunities for low-income families means fewer options to engage in exercise, leading to obesity rates that are twice as high as other children.

Only 39 percent of children in low-income families (200 percent of the federal poverty line) have access to comprehensive, coordinated care within a medical home, compared to 72 percent of families at 400 percent FPL or higher.

Children in low-income families are more likely to have oral health problems, 20 percent compared to 12 percent, and are less like to receive preventative dental care, 74 percent compared to 86 percent.

Disparities in health status, access to care, and environmental supports

Access to prenatal care helps to prevent low birth weight and infant mortality. The lack of access to prenatal care among African-American women means they are two times more likely to experience low birth weight and infant mortality than their White and Latino counterparts.

More than 450,000 children in Illinois (about 15% of the state’s child population) have special health care needs. Of those, 40% do not have adequate health insurance.

Latino parents are least likely to report excellent or good health for their children—67 percent compared to 80 percent for African-American and 93 percent for white children.

State Commitment to Public Education

In FY 2009, only 30 percent of revenue for public elementary-secondary education in Illinois came from state sources – the lowest share among the 50 states. In FY 2012, appropriations for General State Aid to local school districts were at the lowest level since FY 2008.
Questions for Candidates to Consider

- Funding quality child-care, preschool and K-12 education is one of the best investments we can make to improve our future. Early learning helps young brains develop fully, ensures kids enter kindergarten ready to learn, and sets them up for a lifetime of success. Quality K-12 education puts our kids on the path to career readiness and future success. But cuts to state preschool and childcare programs along with K-12 education have devastated our education system in Illinois.

  **Will you ensure adequate, stable and sustainable revenue exists to restore funding for childcare, preschool and K-12 programs and education?**

- Child poverty in Illinois has been increasing over the years. The child poverty rate in Illinois was 21%, compared with 16% in 2005. The number of Illinois children living in areas of concentrated poverty (areas with poverty rates of 20% or more) has increased 32% since 2000. Research clearly shows that poverty negatively impacts children’s health and development, harming their ability to become productive members of society.

  **What responsibility does the state government have to ensure that Illinois children living in poverty are given the best chance to succeed in life?**

- It’s gotten harder and harder for people to make ends meet in this economy. Few parents have the option to not work and stay at home with their children. Without assistance, too many parents cannot ensure that their children will receive the quality childcare they need so parents can work.

  **Do you think the state should help working parents who cannot afford quality childcare?**

- Family economic struggles can have serious and long-lasting effects on children’s health, development, and overall well-being. Children need parents who are able to provide shelter, food and clothing, and to invest in the family’s future. The reality, however, is that Illinois parents with hourly wages at or near the minimum wage do not make enough to meet their families’ basic needs, even if they work full time, 52 weeks a year. At the current state minimum wage of $8.25, someone working 40 hours a week earns just $17,160 a year — more than $2,600 below the federal poverty level for a family of three.

  **Do you think the state should enact policies proven to help low-and-middle income families make ends meet, like increasing the minimum wage and boosting the state’s Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC?**

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