



Testimony before the Appropriations – Elementary and Secondary Education Committee

Submitted by Erin Plumb on behalf of Children's Home & Aid

Good morning. My name is Erin Plumb, and I'm the Program Supervisor for Stronger Beginnings for Families, Children's Home & Aid's Prevention Initiative program. Our organization currently operates five, full day and full year, child care centers with Preschool for All (PFA) throughout the state serving over 600 families. Our organization also provides home visiting services to nearly 500 families, most of whom are through Prevention Initiative (PI) funded home visiting programs. Our home visiting services operate year-round without limiting services in the summer months.

Access to high quality early childhood education programs is crucial to the well-being of our children and families and can help narrow gaps in outcomes that can plague children throughout their education. We appreciate the opportunity today to share how the Early Childhood Block Grant helps children and families in our communities across the state and urge the legislature to include ISBE's additional \$50 million funding request in the state budget.

Stronger Beginnings for Families, Children's Home & Aid's PI-funded home visiting program, allows us to provide a wide range of social-emotional supports to children and their families, including infant early childhood mental health consultations. We make an intentional effort to provide home visiting to families exposed to neglect or abuse and who are involved in the child welfare system. Approximately 30 percent of the families served in our Stronger Beginnings for Families program are also receiving DCFS' Intact Family Services. Because those families experience a range of complex issues and trauma, our staff often experience secondary trauma from being deeply invested in the relationships they have with their clients and families. Early childhood mental health consultations are necessary to meet the needs of children and their families and their support allows our home visitors to do their best work. More funding will allow us to expand this crucial support to our programs.

In addition to enhancing the services to families with the greatest needs, the additional funds we are requesting will support the full cost of providing these services, including investments in worker compensation. It is crucial, now more than ever, to support our early childhood workforce that have been essential workers throughout the pandemic. The past year has emphasized the importance of what we do which is building relationships: between a parent and a child, and a family and their community. Staff stability is a critical component to that relationship. Additional funding dedicated to our workforce will only make our work stronger and benefit more children and families.

We strongly encourage the legislature to support an additional \$50 million for the Early Childhood Block Grant so we can continue to provide the types of services that make Illinois a leader in early care and education. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.