



children's home & aid

AHLQUIST CENTER *for*
Policy | Practice | Innovation

The Ahlquist Center for Policy, Practice & Innovation at Children's Home & Aid

Children's Home & Aid created the Ahlquist Center for Policy, Practice, & Innovation in 2013 as the center of gravity where the agency's practice and strategy experience, insights into innovative programming, and focus on policy and advocacy combine to accelerate change. The Ahlquist Center was established to change policies, systems, and practices to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families in Illinois and to influence change nationally. The Ahlquist Center accomplishes this work through:

- *Advancing state and federal public policies that remove barriers and create opportunities for children and families;*
- *Improving the quality, delivery, and coordination of services – inside and outside of Children's Home & Aid;*
- *Incubating innovative practices that inform public policies.*

Policy

Our Policy Mission

Children's Home & Aid advances the well-being of children by investing in families to disrupt the systemic and multi-generational cycle of racial, social, and economic inequality. While we helped create the modern child welfare system, that system has not and will not tackle the root causes of child abuse and neglect. We must recognize poverty and systemic racism are existential threats to child well-being; a threat too often predicted by the zip code where you live or by the color of your skin. Therefore, the Ahlquist Center leads and advocates for robust policies and social supports which are antiracist, equitable, and directed at creating social capital, economic mobility, and systems designed to ensure children, families and communities thrive.

Legislative Accomplishments

Championed

- **Public Act 102-1029 Additional Resources for families in Extended Family Support Program (2022)**
Written by Children's Home & Aid, this pilot expands the resources available to families caring for their relative children through DCFS' Extended Family Support Program to ensure they don't enter foster care. The new resources include home visiting, parent mentors, and wrap-around case management services. We're excited about this pilot as it provides opportunity to invest more in prevention-focused programs to keep children from entering foster care.
- **Public Act 100-0860: Child Care for Young Children Involved in the Child Welfare System (2018)**
Written by Children's Home & Aid, this act provides families with children ages zero to five and at risk of entering foster care access to free- or low-cost child care through the Child Care Assistance Program while they are in the DCFS Intact Family Services program. Families retain their access to child care for six months after leaving the Intact program to provide ongoing support.

- **Public Act 100-0818: Youth Budget Commission and Fiscal Scan (2018)**
Written by Children's Home & Aid, this act created a yearly fiscal scan of public funding to services to youth ages eight to 25 and established the Youth Budget Commission to oversee the development of the fiscal scan and to make policy and program recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor.

In Collaboration

- **Public Act 102-0700 Expanded Earned Income Credit (2022)**
Permanently expands the Earned Income Credit in Illinois including more Illinoisans in its eligibility and increasing the credit amount to a 20 percent match of the federal credit. Children's Home & Aid worked closely with the Illinois Cost-of-Living Refund Coalition to achieve this monumental change.

Ahlquist Agenda Podcast

The Ahlquist Center for Policy, Practice and Innovation is the policy and advocacy arm of Children's Home & Aid, one of the largest providers of social services in Illinois. In this podcast, we invite you to take an inside look at how we think about policy: why it matters, how it impacts youth, families, and communities in Illinois, and what you can do to help.

Current Policy and Administrative Advocacy

Federal

- **Head Start Automatic Eligibility for Children in Family Preservation Services**

Research shows that Head Start and Early Head Start programs can be utilized as mechanisms to prevent entrance into foster care for young children. We believe by making children receiving family preservation services through a governmental child welfare agency automatically eligible for Head Start, we will further the developmental growth and well-being of children and strengthen families, keeping children and parents together.

State

- **Increasing Access to Driver's Licenses for Youth in Care**

Administering a pilot program with DCFS for youth in the agency's care to pay for certain driving-related expenses. The constraints of the child welfare system create significant barriers for youth to receive their driver's license and this pilot is helping to identify those barriers and promote policies and practices to remove them. Children's Home & Aid also supports the *Foster Youth and Driving Act* by Congressmen Danny Davis and Don Bacon.

- **Making Diapers More Affordable for Families**

Championing legislation to make diapers more affordable for families. Diapers are expensive and one in three families in America struggle with affording enough diapers to keep their infants/toddlers clean and healthy. Diapers are also a frequently requested need from families in our programs. Last year, our crisis nurseries in Bloomington and Rockford handed out over 57,000 diapers to families in addition to other basic needs items like formula and wipes.



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Strategy & Business Development

Our Strategic Approach

Our Strategy & Business Development team leads the execution of key strategic initiatives, implements and monitors processes to support organization-wide systems. The team identifies practice improvements that strengthen our services, advance the mission, and furthers progress toward the agency's strategic plan. This team collaborates cross-functionally at all levels of the organization to evaluate needs and incubates solutions and scale best practices.

Strategic Plan Execution

Over the next five years, Children's Home & Aid will focus on eight strategic priorities to transform the organization and our impact on child & family well-being.



Motivating Themes

Our Strategic Plan centers around three major themes in alignment with the agency's mission and Blueprint for Impact:



Prevention

Continued but deliberate shift upstream with **an emphasis on prevention**



Family

Recognition and commitment to **family as the critical asset** for child well-being



Equity

A more **intentional focus on racial and social equity** to disrupt the cycle of poverty and child maltreatment

Sample Projects

- Establishing and facilitating internal Culture & Engagement Activities
- Gathering requirements and implementing the design of a program Service Directory and Referral System
- Supporting the implementation of new program models and gathering of outcome data for reporting

For more information, please contact Ali Schoon, Senior Policy Advocate, aschoon@childrenshomeandaid.org