

SAL Family and Community Services

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Partners Together... Improving Lives

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December 10, 2020

Illinois Appropriations

Joint Hearing with the Senate Education Committee

Subject Matter On: An update from the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development on the Commission for Equitable funding for Early Childhood Education and Care

Members of Senate Education Committee:

My name is Marcy Mendenhall, CEO of SAL Family and Community Services, a non-profit early care and education centers and health and human service programs in the Quad Cities and in Peoria.

Your action is needed today in supporting and enacting the Early Childhood Funding Commission recommendations. As legislators, you are uniquely aware of the importance of early childhood and how it builds children's brains for kindergarten readiness by employing highly educated staff. To grow Illinois economy and have low unemployment, Illinois parents need to have access to high quality learning environments so they can join and stay in the work force. Lastly, multiple data sources demonstrate the connectiveness between children enrolled in early childhood high quality learning environments and their future life outcomes have reduced incarceration, improved health outcomes, and higher high school graduation rates.

What you may not be aware of the business side of running an early care and education business and how the current funding mechanisms create barriers in providing services to children and families. Many of Illinois early care and education providers are community based or private businesses, not public school based programs. Early care and education system doesn't have a specific funding formula like the public schools. Instead, we are funded through a term you heard today "blending and braiding" which allows to leverage and extend funding sources to address the shortfalls in covering the cost of care for a child from birth to age 5. Even with the blending and braiding of funds, currently there are not enough funds to cover the **total cost of care** for Illinois' youngest citizens. Therefore, childcare businesses continue to seek out local, state, federal grants, partnerships, and other funding opportunities to strengthen the infrastructure to offer high quality care and education. Even then, there remain gaps in the funding systems.

Currently, we have funding from multiple systems: Department of Human Services, Department of Child Family Services, Illinois Board of Education, parent fees, private funders, and private fundraising. These six funding systems have their own funding requirements, individual reporting regulations, and different payment schedules. Illinois early care and education funders make payments anywhere between two weeks in arrears to two payments a year, depending on the program. This inconsistency creates financial struggles and can be



Iowa QRS



solved by having one centralized funding source. As contract compliance is important to our organization, we have hired additional administration to support the individual requirements of our funders, support parents in completing different paperwork, sometimes in duplicate, only the funder name changes, and navigate child/family eligibility requirements. Investing money in additional administration staff diverts money from our front line early care and education teachers and staff who are the real heroes of our field.

Having a streamlined system, with one Illinois early care and education agency, would be beneficial for providers, children and their families, and to you as the legislative funder. There would be equity in funding distribution where all providers would have access. The pandemic has demonstrated to our field that we are underfunded, understaffed, and ultimately under-resourced. The Early Childhood Funding Commission has innovative solutions to a systemic issue. Please listen to these subject matter experts and use your legislative will to support these recommendations. Thank you in advance for continuing to fund early care and education and prioritize Illinois future leaders, our youngest children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcy Mendenhall LISW, RPT". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marcy Mendenhall LISW, RPT
President and CEO
SAL Family and Community Services