



children's home & aid

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Testimony before the Illinois State Senate Appropriations II and Education Committees

Submitted by Janice Moenster on behalf of Children's Home & Aid

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Good morning. My name is Janice Moenster and I am the Director of Early Childhood Services for Children's Home & Aid's Southern Region. Children's Home & Aid has been partnering with children, youth, and families whose potential is at risk to create hope, opportunity, and bright futures throughout Illinois since 1883. The agency offers the full breadth of high-quality state- and federally-funded early childhood programs – from Healthy Families Illinois and home visiting supported by the federal Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) initiative, Early Head Start, and the Prevention Initiative program to the Child Care Assistance Program, Head Start, and Preschool for All. We currently operate five child care centers in addition to serving nearly 500 families through our home visiting services. Home visiting services are an important component of our commitment to serving children and families. I am excited to share with you today why the emerging recommendations from the Early Childhood Funding Commission will lead to and increase care coordination among systems.

We believe that parents are their children's first and best teachers. Our home visitors work with parents in their homes to create safe, stimulating environments through learning child development, positive discipline techniques, and parenting skills. Home visiting programs impact maternal and infant health, prepare children for school, help families become more self-sufficient, and result in safer environments for children. Home visitors are often connectors between families and other services that families need such as referrals to early intervention, coordinating with child welfare caseworkers, or connecting with mental health support. This is especially true in rural areas where resources may be scarce and local relationships can make all the difference in a family's access to support.

Home visiting can be the connective tissue to providing a family with coordinated care.

For the past three years, Children's Home & Aid has been providing home visiting services to a two-generation family involved in the child welfare system through our Prevention Initiative-funded home visiting program, Stronger Beginnings for Families, in the Metro East region. The family was referred to us by the Department of Children and Family Services' Intact Family Services program due to the mother's substance use during her pregnancy. Initially, we were providing home visiting to the mother and her baby, but the baby was eventually placed with her maternal grandmother as a relative placement. Our home visitor continued to work with the grandmother, working through the child's issues with attachment, getting Early Intervention services for her significant developmental delays, and, most recently, connecting the family with necessary supports during the pandemic. These resources allowed the child to receive Early Intervention and home visiting virtually. Our home visitor has navigated the complexities of multiple systems to coordinate care for this family with foster care caseworkers, a court liaison, Early Intervention, and the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program.

This story underlines the complexity of care coordination and is representative of more than 30 percent of the families we currently serve through our Stronger Beginnings home visiting program in the Metro East region. For families involved in the child welfare system, finding quality early education programs can be exceedingly difficult. Additionally, these issues of inequitable access for families involved in child welfare, rural families, or families of color and providers struggling to manage multiple systems of funding and regulation are even more prominent amidst a pandemic. It is crucial that solutions be provided now that will be sustainable for our early childhood and care system

and allow providers to focus on what they do best: provide quality education and care to our youngest Illinoisans.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Should you wish to discuss these issues further, I can be reached at jmoenste@childrenshomeandaid.org