

Memo

From: Ireta Gasner

Date: March 3, 2009

1. What areas of the state budget are you interested in protecting and why are those areas important?

- Specifically related to early childhood education, the areas of the state budget we would like protected are The Early Childhood Block Grant and Home Visiting programs funded through the Department of Human Services, Healthy Families and Parents Too Soon budget lines. Another area of need not currently being addressed is the need for early childhood capital funds for construction and renovation focused on areas with the greatest demonstrated gap between need and current facilities.
- We are also interested in protecting those programs that support the health and economic stability of families with young children including child care, mental health, All Kids, Family Care, TANF, and some maternal and child health programs.
- Protecting these programs is critical for the future of Illinois for three main reasons. First, all learning begins at birth with 85% of the brain developing in the first three years of life. However, we only spend 4% of our education dollars during these years. We need focus our investments to support children during the most critical years which lay the foundation for all future success. Second, investing in these programs will help address Illinois' ranking as one of the top ten states with the worst achievement gap in the country. Too many of our children enter kindergarten without the skills they need to be ready to learn. Finally, it offers Illinois the greatest return on investment. This is not only due to increased positive school outcomes but also reduced social spending on programs such as special education and use of public benefits. Illinois stands to save as much as \$14 dollars for every dollar we invest on early childhood programs.

2. What revenue enhancements would you recommend be implemented to support those areas?

- The Ounce of Prevention Fund has historically and can continue to support revenue options that will provide new resources to fund early childhood programs. Last summer, we testified at education funding reform hearings that if there is a reform package that provides significant new funds for education, early childhood should receive 15% of that funding. Given the evidence cited here and in my written testimony, investments in early childhood are critical for the future economic and social stability of Illinois.