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## **Ounce of Prevention Fund Speaking Out Against Proposed Plans to Gut Early Childhood Education Programs**

Spokespeople Available for Interview During, After June 18 Day of Action Rally at Thompson Center

CHICAGO. In two weeks, vulnerable babies, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families will lose access to home visiting, child care, mental health, and other early education programs when the so-called “Doomsday Budget” scenario becomes a frightening reality for social service programs in Illinois. Barring action from House and Senate leadership and the governor to put forth a new budget, these programs face a reduction in state funding of up to 75 percent starting July 1.

The Ounce is joining hundreds of advocates from early education, early childhood and other social service organizations at a rally against the cuts today at 11:30 am at the Thompson Center.

“At the end of this month, the infrastructure our state has spent the past 25 years building into a national model for early education will be decimated,” said Diana Rauner, Executive Director for the Ounce of Prevention Fund. “By cutting early childhood programs, we’re effectively pulling the rug out from under the working poor. Working parents won’t be able to afford high-quality child care. Their children won’t be prepared for kindergarten and will be less likely to graduate high school. This budget helps perpetuate the cycle of poverty and the state will pay for this for years to come.”

Among the programs formally notified of cuts by the state’s Department of Human Services last week, home visiting programs for at-risk families were among those hardest hit. Home visiting programs such as Healthy Families Illinois, Doula programs, and Parents Too Soon were told to expect cuts of up to 75 percent. These services provide parent coaching to young parents and are proven to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect, boost childhood literacy, and increase high school graduation rates.

The Ounce and its 33 community partners directly provide voluntary home visiting services to 2,100 low-income families throughout the state.

“Even more early childhood education programs will likely face cuts, including the state’s landmark Preschool for All and other programs funded through the Illinois State Board of Education,” Rauner said. Board members are meeting this week in Springfield to discuss the ISBE budget.

“The programs that are helping to narrow the achievement gap that exists for low-income children are at serious risk,” Rauner said. “Economists repeatedly say that when public dollars are restricted, the best

course of action is to prioritize investments in early childhood education programs and in programs that promote human capital development.”

The state’s child care assistance program for low-income working parents, which helps ensure that parents have a high-quality, full-day learning environment for their children while they work or participate in education and training programs, has also been gutted by a more than 72% cut. The proposed cuts also jeopardize the state’s ability to pull down billions of dollars in federal funding for programs, including new funds authorized by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The impact these cuts will have on families is tremendous. More than 6,500 families benefit from home visiting programs. And more than 139,887 families are served through the state’s child care assistance program.

In addition to lost services, the cuts in programs mean a tremendous loss of jobs. Early childhood programs represent a vital industry employing about 56,000 people and contributing more than \$2 billion to the state’s economy. Funding cuts will result in lost jobs for both program staff and the parents who depend on these programs so they can work.

The Ounce is calling on Gov. Pat Quinn and state legislators to create a new budget that is fair to vulnerable families and to support increased revenue to adequately fund early childhood programs.

The Ounce of Prevention Fund gives children in poverty the best chance for success in school and in life by advocating for and providing the highest quality care and education from birth to age five.

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