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Early Childhood Programs Still in Jeopardy with Latest Proposed State Budget

With the General Assembly's latest budget bill passed this weekend, early childhood programs such as Preschool for All, home visiting, and child care are one step closer to facing severe cuts or elimination.

"It is unacceptable for our state to decimate programs for its most vulnerable citizens, especially young children and families," said Diana Rauner, Executive Director of the Ounce of Prevention Fund, an early childhood advocacy group. "This budget seriously hinders the healthy development and growth of young children—and our state's economy—for decades to come."

Budget bill SB1197 gives the Department of Human Services and the Illinois State Board of Education, both of which fund early childhood services, lump sums that fall well short of their current operating budget. DHS receives \$1.6 billion to fund more than \$3.5 billion in services, threatening home visiting, child care, children's mental health, and early intervention services. ISBE has \$900 million in programs that remain unfunded, including \$380 million for the Early Childhood Block Grant. Yet SB1197 provides ISBE with just over \$500 million in funds. As a result, the agencies will have to decide which programs to fund and which to cut.

The Ounce is calling on Gov. Quinn to veto SB1197 and any other bill that cuts funding for early childhood programs. The Ounce is also urging state legislators to create a budget that is fair to vulnerable families and to support increased revenue to adequately fund early childhood programs.

Illinois has been a national leader in offering early childhood programs that improve the school readiness of infants, toddlers and preschoolers at-risk of school failure. But progress in narrowing the achievement gap between at-risk young children and their more advantaged peers is threatened with the new proposed budget.

"It is time for the state to stop looking for a quick fix to solve the state budget deficit," said Rauner. "We need to stick to our long-term priority of strengthening Illinois's economy. Funding early childhood education does just that by giving at-risk children the skills they need to succeed in school and later as part of the workforce."

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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