20 December 2024

Greetings,

In February 2023, Governor JB Pritzker announced Smart Start Illinois. This multi-year initiative aims to ensure equitable access to early childhood services by eliminating preschool deserts, increasing funding for child care providers, expanding home visiting and Early Intervention supports, and more. Smart Start Illinois is the next step in achieving Governor Pritzker's vision for ensuring Illinois is the best state in the nation for families raising young children.

The IDHS Division of Early Childhood commissioned this cost model study to better understand the decline of Early Intervention providers in Illinois and to quantify what it will take to expand the supply of providers. The result is the cost model below, informed by surveys and focus groups with thousands of Illinois early childhood community members.

This model has given us a stronger sense of direction, and we acknowledge there is always more work to do. There are a few areas we need to examine. These include enhancing a person-centered approach to improving Early Intervention, addressing systemic challenges faced by Early Intervention providers, navigating Medicaid and private insurance billing, equitable implementation factors, and more. IDHS and the new Department of Early Childhood will work together to advance a thoughtful and appropriate recommendation for service improvement.

The State of Illinois remains committed to a practice of transparent, honest dialogue with families, providers, advocates, and others in the field. We share this cost model in that spirit, acknowledging the work that remains.

IDHS, in collaboration with the upcoming inaugural Secretary of the Illinois Department of Early Childhood, Dr. Teresa Ramos, will first focus on the development and design phase to find an equitable approach to improving the accessibility and timeliness of Early Intervention services.

In partnership,

Dulce M. Quintero
Secretary Designate
Illinois Department of Human Services