



March 8, 2016

The Fight for Child Care Goes On!

Now is the time to review where we are with making sure that every child in Illinois has quality child care. In March 2015, after hearing the problems and pleas from child care providers and other advocates to find a solution to the funding crisis for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), I introduced House Bill 4194 to appropriate additional amounts from the General Revenue Fund to the Illinois Department of Human Services for the Child Care Assistance Program.

The Illinois Department of Human Services' Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides low-income, working families with access to quality, affordable child care, allowing them to continue working and improving the health, emotional and social development of children. Families are required to cost-share on a sliding scale based on family size, income and the number of children in care. In the spring of 2015, the CCAP budget was underfunded by almost \$300 million. In Illinois, there are more than 3,000 licensed day care centers, 8000 licensed day care homes and 700 group day care homes with a combined capacity to serve more than 255,000 children.

In the Spring of 2015, I started a MoveOn petition generating more than 11,000 signatures in support of full funding for quality child care. At the March 2, 2015 press conference at the Thompson Center in Chicago, I was joined by child care providers, parents and children who proclaimed a need for funding for the program. Also in March 2015, I was joined by child care advocates and providers Nakisha Hobbs and Tamara Fair in a meeting with the Speaker of the House Michael J. Madigan to discuss the issue.

Also in March 2015, a busy month, I passed House Resolution 254 unanimously through the House which creates the Commission to Reform Child Care in Illinois. The Commission is charged to study current local and state provisions involving child care and make recommendations to the House of Representatives to help ensure that there are simple and fair systems to provide quality child care that is affordable for families, especially those on low incomes. The Commission is also charged to develop a legislative and administrative agenda that would effectively address the issues surrounding child care in the state of Illinois.

In August 2015, I co-sponsored SB 2042 which the General Assembly passed and was signed into law (P.A. 99-0409). The act includes several federal appropriations to support IDHS programs which allowed the department to begin issuing payments to center providers and home network providers.

By September 2015, I initiated a petition that supports House Joint Resolution 94 which I introduced that would restore eligibility for many parents seeking child care assistance, and more than 2700 people signed the petition.

In November of 2015, after working with more than 100 child care providers from throughout the state leading to months of organizing and political pressure, child care was supposedly “saved,” and I commended the governor for re-establishing the previous CCAP eligibility standards and guidelines. Providers were hopeful of surviving and providing the care needed by so many of their children once the eligibility levels increased to 162% of the poverty level after months of suffering at only 50%, even though the levels had not been restored to the previous level of 185% of the poverty level.

Working with Child Care Advocates United, another press conference is being held this week. Besides the fight over eligibility requirements, now providers are suffering a slow death because of extremely delayed payments as a result of slow paperwork processing. According to Child Care Advocates United, some parent cases have been held in paperwork limbo for as long as 90 days, and because of slow paperwork processing, child care centers and home daycares are only receiving a THIRD OF THEIR RECEIVABLES. This is causing a snowball effect. Administrators/owners are being forced to cut center hours. Teachers are being laid-off. Parents are having child care services suspended because they are still waiting on the system to work. Some students with children are not able to go to school because they can't get child care. In most extreme cases, centers are closing because they cannot wait any longer to be reimbursed for the services they have already given families on behalf of the State.

We forcefully request that three things happen NOW:

1. We call on the governor to fully return the eligibility level back to 185% of the poverty level – now it is at 162% of poverty level, leaving thousands of children ineligible for child care. We still have thousands of children without childcare because the governor will not fully reverse his Executive Order and return the eligibility back to 185% of the poverty level.
2. We call attention to the slow processing of application paperwork which is done by just one agency in Cook County, Action for Children (AFC). We are working with AFC and DHS to speed up the processing and approval of applications. The time taken for approval is at an all-time high in Cook County and it is causing a great hardship on businesses and families.
3. We ask that the redetermination process be ended - redetermination kicks families off the program when additional paperwork is not received. Determining eligibility should be an annual process only.

Please call Governor Rauner at 312-814-2121 or 217-782-0244 and tell him to fully fund child care in Illinois and speed up the process for approving families for CCAP so child care centers can continue to serve families and children who really need their expert care.

Sincerely,



La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District