



September 19, 2017

A Late Win for Child Care

Governor Bruce Rauner announced on Monday, September 18, 2017, that the state's Department of Human Services (DHS) will broaden access to the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). The move fulfills an agreement made with the legislature in 2015 to raise the income eligibility criteria to 185% of the federal poverty level from 162%. It means 16,000 more children will receive child care each month, for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2018.

However, I have to wonder why it took the governor so long to act – from 2015 to 2017?

The Illinois Department of Human Services' Child Care Assistance Program 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 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 DHS for the CCAP.

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 created the Commission to Reform Child Care in 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 DHS 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 was called in March 2016 because providers were suffering from extremely delayed payments as a result of slow paperwork processing, with child care centers and home daycares are only receiving one third of their receivables. Child care administrators/owners cut center hours, teachers were laid-off, and parents had child care services suspended. In March 2016, we once again forcefully called on the governor to fully return the eligibility level back to 185% of the poverty level.

In the spring of 2016, the Illinois House voted to pass my House Resolution 1014 to designate the fourth week of May 2016 as Child Care Awareness Week in the state of Illinois and to thank those men and women who care for the children of our state, and we once again called on the governor to restore the eligibility level to 185%.

Now it is September 2017. It is great that the eligibility level has finally been restored to 185%, but it has taken the governor 18 months to respond.

And, we still have work to do to speed up the paperwork process for approving families for CCAP so child care centers can continue to serve families and children who really need their expert care.

Over these 18 months, the damage has been done. One analysis suggests that access to child care for 30,000 children was interrupted while we waited for the governor to respond.

But, it has to be said that it has been the constant, persistent and steady work of advocates for children and for child care that has created this change in policy that helps children and their families. This work and this advocacy is what we really need to celebrate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'La Shawn K. Ford', written in a cursive style.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District