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November 14, 2020

On behalf of the 103,000 members of the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT), I am writing regarding a recommendation being considered by the Governor's Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding to create a new state agency whose mission is to coordinate early childhood programming and funding in Illinois. IFT has a long history of supporting high-quality early childhood care and education. The early childhood years are critical to a child's health, cognitive, and social-emotional development.

At Commission meetings, IFT representatives have expressed support for greater coordination of early childhood services into one agency and have spoken in favor of this coordination occurring within the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), along with the dire need to increase support to all existing state agencies so that they can reach a staffing and capacity level to fulfill and promote their individual missions. IFT supports the concept that greater coordination of early childhood services will elevate and center the importance of early childhood care and education. We strongly advocate for adequate and sustainable funding across the P20 systems.

However, our representatives have voiced opposition to the creation of a new agency at this time, raising questions that the IFT believes must be answered before the Commission can put forth this recommendation. These questions include:

1. Given the state's scarcity of resources, how would the creation of a new agency devoted to early childhood impact the funding of existing agencies such as ISBE, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)? Will existing agencies lose funding to support the creation of a new agency? If so, what are the projected impacts on existing agencies?
2. How will early childhood responsibilities currently addressed by existing agencies be transitioned to a new agency?
3. Current state agencies often disperse early childhood responsibilities across multiple divisions of the existing agency work (as one of many examples, ISBE's Educator Effectiveness team is tasked with licensure preK-12). Given that, what will happen to staff at existing agencies who are responsible for early childhood? What is the plan to mitigate the impact on staff who may be transferred to a new agency?



4. How will early childhood special education and the implementation of IDEA be coordinated given that federal law places responsibility on the ISBE?
5. Who will be responsible for early childhood licensure approval and renewal, which is currently the responsibility of ISBE? This will be particularly impactful on K-2 teachers whose license endorsements are early childhood. The kindergarten endorsement is only on an early childhood endorsement, while grades 1-2 could be early childhood or elementary. This could create confusion in the field if early childhood licensure became the responsibility of an early childhood agency. For teachers who have both an early childhood and an elementary endorsement, would they be responsible for license renewal with two different agencies? Would that result in additional licensure fees, thereby creating an undue burden for some teachers?
6. What is being considered for the governance structure of a new agency for early childhood? How would this new agency interact with other agencies, and specifically, ISBE?
7. What would the impact of a new early childhood agency be on school districts? Specifically, for those school districts that house preK programs, would they be accountable to two different agencies?

I thank the Commission for providing the opportunity to provide written input to expand upon our comments in Commission meetings. As the Commission considers its deliberations, I strongly urge that the answers to these questions be fully investigated and considered prior to finalizing recommendations to the Governor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Daniel J. Montgomery'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Daniel J. Montgomery

President and Chief Operating Officer

Illinois Federation of Teachers