

Early Learning Council (ELC) Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Resources and Programs

January 15, 2026 | 11am-12pm

Total Attendance: 83

Co-Chairs: Celena Sarillo (Start Early), Alicia Lynch-Deatherage (ISBE)

State Agency Members: Maya Portillo (IDEC), Rich Bossert (IDHS), Jean Davis (IDHS), Jenny Metcalf (ISBE), Natalie Toro (ISBE), Nicole Craft (ISBE), Lori Orr (IDHS), Lesley Schwartz (IDHS), Shontee Blankenship (IDEC), Sinthu Ramalingam (IDHS), Taylor Seal (ISBE), Marilyn Vazquez (IDEC), Rosario Wortman (IDHS), Zach Allen (IDHS)

Attendees: Adam Slade, Alyssa Mendez, Angela Farwig, Ann Erickson, Anne VanderWeele, April Berthiaume, Ashley Heidenrich, Azar Khounani, Brenda Berman, Bri Stormer, Britt Gordon-McKeon, Candace Moore, Carie Bires, Carisa Hurley Davis, Carmen Garcia, Catherine Enright, Cathy Mannen, Celia Bartel, Christina Navarro, Chuck Hartseil, Danielle Blick, Dara Cohen, Denise Castillo Dell Isola, Denise Henry, Donna Emmons, Dr. Antoinette Taylor, Ella Shaw, Elysia Aufmuth, Erika Mendez, Erin Gutierrez, Gaye Duyurucu, Gina Hill, Hannah Glick, Jeffrey M, Jennifer Brown, Jenny Wierzchon, Kathleen Kimmey, Kayla Goldfarb, Kesha Harris, Laurel Mateyka, Lee Eklund, Lynn Burgett, Marcy Mendenhall, Maria Deniz, Monique Hudson, Monique Lopez, Pat Chamberlain, Patty Sherman, Paula Schnicker Johnson, Paula White, Pedro Bortoto, Rochelle Golliday, Rosario Hernandez, Rowan Atwood, Sally Puleo, Sandra Little-McDonnell, Sara Slaughter, Sean Noble, Shannon Cribaro, Stephen Vick, Talibah Moore, Tammy King, Tanisha Harris, Tasha Smith, Tiffany Powell, Yaritza Chavez, Cicely Fleming

Minutes

Welcome

Alicia Lynch-Deatherage (ISBE – ELC Co-Chair) welcomed members and public members.

Federal Government Updates

Child Care Funding Freeze: Lesley Schwartz (Director, IDHS-Division of Early Childhood) provided an update on the Child Care Funding Freeze.

- On 1/6, the Trump Administration announced their decision to freeze \$10 billion in federal funds for five Democratic-led states, temporarily halting IL's ability to draw down more than \$1 billion in social service funding for Illinois, including funds that support IL's CCAP program.
- On 1/9, the U.S. District Court for Southern District of New York issued a [temporary restraining order](#).

- IDEC + IDHS and Governor's Office are in constant communication and sharing updates as they become available.
- **As of today, providers and families should continue to operate as usual.**

Questions from members:

- How long does the Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) last?
 - Answer: The TRO is expected to last only 14 days, but there can be extensions.
- Is there a contingency plan for after the TRO expiration? I haven't heard of one yet but wanted to check.

Child Care Development Fund Notice of Proposed Rulemaking: Sinthu Ramalingam (Senior Policy Advisor, IDHS Division of Early Childhood) presented on the rulemaking.

- On January 5, 2026, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) published a new Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that would rescind several requirements from a March 2024 final rule for the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), issued during the Biden Administration.
- Comments on the proposed rule are due on February 4, 2026.
- [Link](#) to Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

The proposed rule would rescind the following requirements:

- Grants & Contracts: The NPRM proposes to rescind requirements for states to provide some portion of direct child care services via grants or contracts for children in underserved areas, infants and toddlers, and children with disabilities.
- Co-Payment Caps: The NPRM proposes reverting from the mandatory 7% family co-payment cap to allowing states flexibility in determining what constitutes a cost barrier for families.
- Provisions to stabilize provider payments: The NPRM proposes to rescind the requirement that payments to providers are paid prospectively (i.e., by the beginning of the delivery of services) and based on enrollment rather than attendance.

Questions/Comments from members:

- Question: Illinois would still have the option to keep the rescinded rules in place, right?
 - Answer: The Department is carefully monitoring the situation and exploring every appropriate, available option.
- Question: To be clear. It is proposed to be paid at the beginning of service but to pay only for attendance rather than enrollment is that what I am reading?

- Answer: The 2024 Final Rules had required payments to providers be paid both at the beginning of service and pay based on enrollment. This new NPRM rescinds both, and would no longer require payment at the beginning of service nor based on enrollment.
- Question: But Illinois could still choose to keep those rules in place, correct?
 - Answer: The rules are still proposed. Once rules are finalized, the Department will know more and can provide more information.
- Comment: We do get paid on enrollment currently but get paid at the end of service. A center could not make it being paid on attendance rather than enrollment.

Federal Continuing Resolution: Celena provided an update on the Federal Government Continuing Resolution.

- Federal funding expired under the current Continuing Resolution (CR) on January 30, 2026.
- The House and Senate Appropriations Committees are continuing negotiations on a final FY2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, which may be included in an additional minibuss package later this month, if an agreement is able to be reached.

Head Start Litigation Update: Celena provided an update on the Head Start litigation.

- A federal judge has issued a preliminary injunction blocking the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) ban on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), as well as proposed reductions in workforce and office closures within the Office of Head Start.

Questions/Comments from Members:

- A member shared an upcoming webinar that may be of interest to participants. [2pm CT: HS Litigation Update: What the new Federal Ruling Means for DEI and Workforce Cuts.](#)
- A member shared a resource. IHSA--"What's Going on Right Now" https://www.ilheadstart.org/advocacy_whats_going_on_righ.php

IDEC Update

Maya Portillo (Project Director, Funding Design at IDEC) provided an update on the Preschool Development Block Grant Birth to Five (PDG-B5) Illinois application. Illinois was not selected as a recipient of funding for the PDG-B5 grant due to insufficient funds.

Questions/Comments from Members:

- A member said kudos again to the IL team that scrambled to assemble that PDG app on super-short notice, nonetheless

- A member agreed and offered this resource
<https://www.ffyf.org/resources/2026/01/update-23-states-receive-grants-to-strengthen-child-care/>

Public Comment

- Marcy Mendenhall provided comment that the Child Care Funding Freeze has a big impact for providers on the ground. Marcy asked if there was anything that providers can do to help support.
- Bri Stormer provided comment and said that one thing they have been hearing is how this Child Care Funding Freeze feels similar to similar to when there was a cut to child care funding during a previous administration. We need to help providers with scenario planning. Providers need at least a couple weeks lead time to make changes to their program. Providers feel like they have dealt with this before.
- A member shared in the chat – “Depending upon how this CCDF funding situation plays out, we may need to take action like EC did during COVID--Child care is essential in my view!!”

Next Steps

Before closing, Alicia asked members to fill out a poll to allow the co-chairs to better understand preferred meeting cadence moving forward for the ELC Ad Hoc meetings.

Questions/Comments from Members:

- If we spread-out the meetings to be less frequent — which could be AOK — we should still reserve the right to schedule others on an as-needed basis. Considering everything remains a bit bonkers
- If possible, can the meeting date or time vary (not always Thursday mornings)?