



## **Retired Military Leaders for Opioid-Settlement Funding to be Dispersed to Key Birth-to-3 Programs**

*Helping Home-Visiting and Early Intervention Programs to Strengthen National Security*  
Fall 2022

With concerns for national security in mind, we — retired admirals and generals from the U.S. military — welcome the prospect of utilizing a significant new funding source to help the children and families of Illinois, who have been severely impacted by the opioid crisis. We refer to resources coming from the settlements of lawsuits against pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors of opioids. The incoming funds — including \$760 million from the first such settlement in Illinois, as well as any forthcoming settlements from similar lawsuits — should be used to assist children and their parents by investing in programs focused on prevention and treatment efforts, which communities most affected by the crisis greatly need. We strongly encourage those tasked with determining the disbursement of this funding to include two key, early childhood service: home-visiting programs, which have been shown to make a positive difference by offering useful “coaching” for the parents of infants and toddlers, and Early Intervention therapies for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities.

Given our backgrounds in the armed forces, we care deeply about the children of our country and how the opportunities and experiences available to them at a young age can impact our national security. We are united as members of Mission: Readiness, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of over 750 admirals and generals nationwide, in support of policies and investments that will help children excel in school and later in life, including military service if they choose it. Shockingly though, 77% of the nation’s youth, aged 17 to 24 years old, are currently ineligible to serve in the military due to a combination of factors that include obesity, poor education, and having a criminal record. The opioid crisis is felt here, distinctly: 30% of military-service ineligibilities are due to drug abuse. As a result of this, military recruitment is struggling, and our national security is at risk. Research shows that these later-in-life issues can be mitigated by helping children during their most crucial, developmental years through high-quality care and education, strengthening their chances of leading successful, healthy lives, including pursuing a military career if they desire.

Investing resources from the opioid settlements can boost services that help families break cycles of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as parental drug abuse — experiences that correlate with a greater chance of children abusing drugs later in life. Providing parents with “coaching” assistance through voluntary home-visiting programs is an investment in prevention, helping reduce

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children's exposure to ACEs and their likelihood of opioid abuse. Plus, such programs can help addicted parents find sobriety through screenings, education, treatment referrals, and coordination of care.

Unfortunately, 15,000 families in Illinois do not have access to the home-visiting help they need, and 17 of our state's counties do not provide any such services, according to the state's Prenatal to Three Initiative (now known as Raising Illinois). Allocating funds from the opioid-related settlements to programs offered by Healthy Families Illinois, Parents Too Soon/Maternal Child Home Visiting, Nurse Family Partnerships, and the Prevention Initiative can bridge these gaps in care, and better the lives of children and families.

Early Intervention services should be a similar priority for settlement funding distribution, considering the way these therapies often help infants born to mothers with opioid use disorder, and thus suffering from opioid withdrawal (Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, or NAS). Such aid is vitally important, considering that Illinois' NAS rate grew a stunning 64% from 2011-17, alone.

We must do better by our children, families, and our nation by increasing the availability of high-quality programs that positively impact the communities and families most affected by the opioid crisis. We applaud Attorney General Raoul and his fellow prosecutors for their work on these monumental lawsuits. We also thank the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois Opioid Crisis Response Advisory Council for the creation of the State Opioid Action Plan, which emphasizes the need for "establishing and growing systems for supporting all families impacted by" opioid use disorder. Finally, we pledge to continue to call attention to the needs of Illinois' youth and encourage efforts to strengthen the reach of high-quality programs that provide support to families, reduce the likelihood of future drug abuse, and thereby increase children's opportunities to succeed.

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