

Illinois Business Leaders Call for Making Early Childhood Prevention Services a Priority for Opioid-Settlement Funding

Fall 2022

We, the undersigned business leaders of Illinois, have seen the terrible toll that the opioid crisis has taken on our state's workforce, families and communities. Therefore, we welcome the remediation dollars coming to our state from the settlement of lawsuits against opioid distributors and manufacturers. These forthcoming monies represent a critically important opportunity for Illinois to greatly strengthen prevention and treatment efforts, with particular attention to communities hardest hit by the opioid crisis. As decision-makers assess the appropriate prioritization of settlement dollars, we urge the inclusion of early childhood services that have been shown to make a positive difference. In particular, we recommend some settlement resources be provided to home-visiting programs that provide "coaching" for the parents of infants and toddlers, as well as Early Intervention therapies that help very young children who experience developmental delays or disabilities.

According to a [2020 US Department of Labor report](#), the opioid crisis has harshly affected employers across the country. Seventy-five percent of employers feel that their workplace has been impacted by opioid-related issues. Employer concerns include difficulty finding qualified workers who can pass drug screens, rising health care costs, and increased absenteeism and reduced productivity. There are additional safety concerns because opioid use can contribute to workplace injuries.

As business leaders across employment sectors, we've seen these dynamics play out in the workplace, and we have witnessed the tragic effects that opioid abuse and addiction have had on the children and families of our communities. The rate of babies born exposed to opioids (Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, or NAS) grew by 64 percent between 2011 and 2017. Additionally, parental drug abuse is classified as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and is closely associated with other ACEs such as child abuse and neglect, as well as other family ills. Research shows that such early-in-life challenges, especially in relation to multiple ACEs, can increase the chances of children themselves abusing drugs as adults. This generates a corrosive and repetitive pattern of substance abuse in our communities, for which we need effective, evidence-based interventions.

Research consistently shows how high-quality early care and education services can strengthen the likelihood of young children growing-up to lead successful lives, on track for school and work. Programs designed to support the most at-risk families with young children — such as voluntary home-visiting programs, in which trained professionals provide parents with "coaching" assistance — have been shown to help break the cycle of substance abuse by building parenting skills, connecting parents with needed services, and building childhood resilience. Not only does this help the workforce of today by connecting parents to needed treatment services, but it also supports the development of the workforce of tomorrow by building the resilience of young children and setting them on a more positive course. That course can be further strengthened by Early Intervention services, which support

various therapies for infants and toddlers experiencing development delays or disabilities, conditions that sometimes result from NAS.

The need for these programs is great. For example, an analysis completed for our state's Prenatal to Three Initiative (now known as Raising Illinois) found thousands of families lacking the home-visiting help they need. Directing some of the opioid settlement funds to fill these gaps in services — especially for communities hardest hit by the opioid crisis — is a key element in a well-rounded approach to prevention and treatment, one that will also bolster our workforce and economy.

We therefore welcome this opportunity to encourage state leaders to focus additional resources where they can aid the most vulnerable among us in home-visiting programs such as Healthy Families Illinois, Parents Too Soon/Maternal Child Home Visiting, Nurse Family Partnership, and Prevention Initiative, as well as in Early Intervention services.

We appreciate the work of Attorney General Raoul and prosecutors from across the state in pursuing these momentous lawsuits. We thank the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois Opioid Crisis Response Advisory Council for their efforts in creating the State Opioid Action Plan, which — in draft form — calls for supporting communities “in establishing and growing systems for supporting all families impacted by” opioid use disorder. This support for vulnerable families improves the chances of setting children on a positive trajectory for school and employment success, thus also improving our state's economy in the long run.

Sincerely, the undersigned Illinois business leaders and members of ReadyNation –

Tony Beiermann
Community Senior VP,
First Mid Bank & Trust
Peoria

Desiree Bennyhoff
President & CEO,
Edwardsville/Glen Carbon
Chamber of Commerce
Edwardsville

Brad Billings
President & CEO (Retired),
Blessing Health System
Quincy

Carla Bobell
Executive Director,
Canton Area Chamber
of Commerce
Canton

Melissa Boltz
President & CEO,
Lombard Area Chamber of
Commerce & Industry
Lombard

Matt Duffy
Executive Director,
DeKalb Chamber of Commerce
DeKalb

Kayla Edwards
Managing Partner,
Express Employment
Professionals
Springfield

Kathy Gilmore
President,
Valley Industrial Association
Geneva

Maureen Glasoe
Owner,
Virgo Words
Evanston

Joshua Gunn
President & CEO,
Peoria Area Chamber
of Commerce
Peoria

Jeff Hettrick
Executive Director,
Ottawa Area Chamber
of Commerce
Ottawa

Maureen Kahn
President & CEO,
Blessing Health System
Quincy

John Keller
President,
Riverbend Growth Association
Godfrey

LoRayne Logan
President & Founder,
Workplace Staffing
Rockford

Sarah Marion
Executive Director,
Manteno Chamber of Commerce
Manteno

Kevin O’Keeffe
Executive Director,
Bolingbrook Area Chamber
of Commerce
Bolingbrook

Mike Paone
Executive Vice President,
Joliet Region Chamber of
Commerce & Industry
Joliet

Margaret Perreault
President & CEO,
Batavia Chamber of Commerce
Batavia

Jason Powell
CEO,
Bainbridge Enterprises LLC
Marion

Nate Ruben
Principal,
Ruben Digital
Wheeling

Manuel Sanchez
Founder & Managing Principal,
Sanchez Daniels & Hoffman LLP
Chicago

Lisa Savegnago
President,
Nameplate and Panel Technology
Carol Stream

Kim Schilf
President & CEO,
Lincoln Park Chamber
of Commerce
Chicago

Johnna Schultz
Project Manager,
Effingham Regional
Growth Alliance
Effingham

Paula Schmidt
President,
Geneva Chamber
of Commerce
Geneva

Chris Setti
CEO,
Greater Peoria Economic
Development Council
Peoria

Derek Sherman
Senior Consultant,
Blane Canada, Ltd.
Belvidere

Rudy Valdez
Vice President,
South West Ideas for Today &
Tomorrow
Rockford

Ashley Villareal
President & CEO,
Kankakee County Chamber
of Commerce
Kankakee

Lisa Weitzel
President,
Illinois Association of Chamber of
Commerce Executives
Springfield

Anna Weselak
Owner/Consultant,
Weselak & Associates
Lombard

Bonnie Wheeler
Vice President, News (retired),
Mel Wheeler, Inc.
Carterville

Karen Wilson
Owner/Agent,
Karen Wilson State Farm
Godfrey

Terri Winfree
President,
Chicago Southland Chamber
of Commerce
Frankfort