



Testimony on \$25 m for Early Childhood Education Capital Allocation
Presented by Sylvia Puente, Executive Director, Latino Policy Forum
April 16, 2009

Good evening, my name is Sylvia Puente and I am the Executive Director of the Latino Policy Forum and a member of the Illinois Early Learning Council. The Latino Policy Forum is a non-profit advocacy organization focused on empowering the Latino community through collective action in order to transform public policies that will ensure the well-being of our community and the state as a whole.

Our request is to include at least \$25 million dollars in a comprehensive capital bill targeted to pre-school repair and new construction. This request will provide greater access to high-quality early childhood educational services in Chicago and throughout the state to low-income children, in areas of highest need, which are primarily areas with growing Latino populations.

The appropriation of capital funding for early childhood facilities would simultaneously address two policy goals: building the supply of facilities and making sure that these spaces are designed to support programmatic quality. There is currently no funding to repair crumbling facilities, expand upon overcrowded space or build new preschool classrooms in the many areas of Illinois that desperately need them.

For the past two years, the Illinois Early Learning Council has worked on both of these goals. The Council has created a sophisticated plan for the investment of future funding for early childhood facilities. The four key principles are:

- Early Childhood capital funds would be administered by the Capital Development Board through a grant funding mechanism.
- There would be a separate set aside for the City of Chicago, as there is in early education funding.
- The program would be open to projects serving or proposing to serve infants, toddlers, and/or preschoolers who are 3-and 4- years old.
- Funding should be directed to those communities where there is the greatest gap between children in need of services and existing capacity.

For the Latino population, building ECE facilities is crucial, given that one in three newborns in the region is Latino and more than half of Latinos live in the suburbs. The Latino population growth is being fueled by births; in fact 70% of the growth is due to births. It is critical to the economic well-being of our State to increase access to ECE through an investment in facilities.

Investments in early childhood educational facilities are more than investments in physical capital; they are investments in human capital. To quote from Harriet Meyer, the President of the Ounce of Prevention Fund, "Research tells us that the achievement gap is measurable and

apparent by 18 months. We know that verbal skills are essential to success in school, but at age 4, children in poverty know a fraction of the words that middle-class children do. We know that the differences between these groups are unchanged at age 5, age 12, and beyond.” Making this investment is a step in reducing the education achievement gap and essential to supplying an educated workforce of tomorrow.

Other colleagues in this effort are Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois, Illinois Action for Children, Ounce of Prevention Fund and Voices for Illinois Children. We have been advocating for this issue for quite some time. In order to correct for the disconnect between the provision of services and the demand for high-quality early childhood services and facilities, it is imperative that the General Assembly pass a comprehensive capital bill with at least \$25 million dollars reserved for pre-school repair and construction.

I would like to thank all of the Representatives in attendance for convening this hearing and for the opportunity to testify.