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## **45-plus Latino parents to Springfield legislators: “We’re counting on steady state funding”**

*As Federal sequestration, CPS school closings, and Illinois budget woes threaten vital early education programs, local parents call on legislations to hold state funds steady at annual Springfield Advocacy Day on April 30.*

**INTERVIEWS:** An advocacy training session for parents will be held on Thursday, April 25 at El Valor’s Carlos Cantu Children & Family Center: 2434 S. Kildare, Chicago. Media are invited to the session at 7:40 p.m. to interview participants in advance of their departure to Springfield. For more information, contact Cristina Pacione-Zayas at 773-418-5528 [chpacione-za@latinopolicyforum.org](mailto:chpacione-za@latinopolicyforum.org).

**CHICAGO, April 23, 2013** – As Chicago-based early education providers grapple with a tough mix of Illinois budget woes, pending school closures, the sequestration of federal funds, and a recent realignment of city preschool funding, more than 45 local Latino parents will travel to Springfield on April 30, calling on legislators to protect and restore an increasingly vital source of revenue: state dollars earmarked for Illinois’ youngest learners. As Latinos now represent a quarter of Illinois children under the age of 5, access to quality early childhood education (ECE) and child care are especially critical in Latino communities.

“As both city and federal resources become increasingly uncertain, families with young children are counting on legislators to hold state funding for early learning programs steady. But Illinois’ fiscal woes continue to threaten the state’s investment in preschool, home-visiting, and child care,” said Martin Torres, senior policy analyst with the Latino Policy Forum. “Latino-serving early education providers are especially vulnerable as they scramble to serve a growing demographic with stagnant and shrinking pools of resources.”

During his March budget address, Governor Quinn proposed maintenance of state funding for the Early Childhood Block Grant, which funds Preschool for All and home-visiting programs across the state. While the recommendation underscores the Governor’s commitment to early education, the proposed allocation remains nearly \$80 million below Fiscal Year 2009 levels and the state is serving 22,000 fewer at-risk children than it was just a few years ago.

The Governor’s budget proposal also included a \$10.3 million increase in funds for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which allows low-income parents to access high-quality care for their children while they work or pursue additional education. But the modest proposal is not enough to lower parent co-payments or elevate eligibility for the program back to 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, as was the case in past years. As a result, many working parents remain ineligible for child care assistance and those who qualify have to pay more to access services, forcing many parents to make tough decisions between continuing to work outside of their homes or caring for their children.

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## **Early Education Advocacy Day//2**

The benefits of early education and child care are well documented: Research shows that academically-oriented child care and early education lay solid cognitive foundations for young learners, which translate into reduced remedial education, criminal justice, and health-related costs down the road. The University of Chicago's Noble Laureate Dr. James Heckman suggests that each dollar invested in such programs yields a \$7 return. What's more, Illinois CCAP allows nearly 80,000 families to work outside the home, an important economic consideration in trying fiscal times.

"The Governor understands the importance of early education and child care for all Illinois families, but budget realities mean that even the most critical programs aren't exempt from the fiscal belt-tightening," said Torres. "With so many funding uncertainties in Chicago, we simply can't afford for state funding to be further compromised – and that's the message we'll deliver to Springfield."

State funding uncertainties come on the heels of challenges at the city and federal levels. Chicago Public Schools recently announced the closure of 54 neighborhood schools—a move that jeopardizes the 1,500 preschool slots housed in buildings that are scheduled to be shuttered. And at the federal level, even as President Obama has announced plans for a \$75 billion investment in early childhood education over the next decade, federal sequestration means an immediate five percent across-the-board cut to early childhood education funding resulting in 2,700 fewer Head Start slots in Illinois.

Parents traveling to Springfield with the Latino Policy Forum are affiliated with the following Latino-serving child care and early childhood education providers: Carole Robertson Center for Learning, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Christopher House, El Hogar del Niño, El Valor, Erie Neighborhood House, Family Focus Nuestra Familia, Gads Hill Center, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, and Through a Child's Eyes.

## **About the Latino Policy Forum**

The Latino Policy Forum is the only organization in the Chicago area that facilitates the involvement of Latinos at all levels of public decision-making. The Forum conducts analysis to inform, influence and lead. Its goals are to improve education outcomes, advocate for affordable housing, promote just immigration policies, and engage diverse sectors of the community, with an understanding that advancing Latinos advances a shared future. For more information, visit [www.latinopolicyforum.org](http://www.latinopolicyforum.org).

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