

*January 9, 2009*

**Prevent Child Abuse Illinois** envisions an Illinois where all children grow up in healthy nurturing homes and communities free of abuse, neglect, or violence of any kind. Since 1990, PCA Illinois has provided key leadership in that effort working in partnership with individuals, organizations, and communities through public awareness, education, and community assistance, and by advocating for effective public policies and services to strengthen families and children.

Our priority policy concern in 2009 continues to be expansion of proven home visiting programs for new parents. PCA Illinois has promoted and assisted the development of the Healthy Families Illinois home visiting program since its inception and collaborates with other advocates to support additional evidence-based program models as well. Our ultimate goal is for these programs to reach full scale in Illinois serving every young family where this support is needed.

Prevent Child Abuse Illinois will also support the key issues raised by our child advocacy partners, **Illinois Association of Court Appointed Special Advocates**, and **Voices for Illinois Children**.

1. Healthy Families Illinois is a voluntary program of intensive and continuing home visiting which assists parents of newborns through education, hands-on coaching, and access to community services. It is modeled after and credentialed by Healthy Families America, a national initiative of Prevent Child Abuse America. Its goals are to promote positive parenting, to maximize child health and development, and to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Begun in 1997 with state funding, HFI has now reached \$12.3 million in state funding with programs in 51 different communities serving over 3,000 families each year. There was a modest growth in programming in the current year and this has to continue. Our vision is for this service to reach full scale in Illinois through incremental growth each year.

*In 2009, we will seek an \$8.2 million increase for new parent home visiting services in Illinois.*

*At the federal level, we will continue to advocate for passage of The Education Begins at Home Act (EBAH) to provide \$500 million over three years to help states establish or expand quality home visitation programs for new parents.*

2. The Illinois Association of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) is leading efforts to increase support to Illinois abused and neglected children through the provision of Court Appointed Special Advocates for each child. A CASA is a trained volunteer who serves as an advocate in the court system interacting with the child and providing information in the child's best interest directly to the court. Operating under careful guidelines established by National CASA for an intensive and ongoing commitment to the child, volunteers in Illinois are serving just over 4,000 children each year. The actual need, however, is about seven times greater. Illinois is one of only six states that do not fund CASA programs.

*Once again, in 2009, PCA Illinois will support an appropriation to improve and expand the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program in Illinois.*

3. The Voices for Illinois Children policy agenda<sup>1</sup> includes several additional education, health, and economic security policies that also will:

- Improve learning opportunities for young children;
- Reform school funding fairness and adequacy, and improve school quality;
- Strengthen children's mental as well as physical health;
- Address perinatal depression;
- Grow the Earned Income Tax Credit's help for low-income, working families;
- Strengthen child care access and quality for working families;
- Bolster services for youths aging-out of the state's child welfare system;
- Support vital school- and transportation-related construction and repair projects; and
- Improve the state revenue system to help maintain vital services for kids and families as well as treat them more fairly.

***In 2009, we will endorse and actively support the Voices for Illinois Children Policy Agenda***

<sup>1</sup> For a full description of the Voices for Illinois Children policy agenda, see *Policy Agenda for 2009*, available at [www.voices4kids.org](http://www.voices4kids.org).

For additional information, or to learn how you can help, contact:

**Prevent Child Abuse Illinois**

528 S. 5th St., Ste. 211, Springfield, IL 62701 (217.522.1129), [www.preventchildabuseillinois.org](http://www.preventchildabuseillinois.org)

**Voices for Illinois Children**

208 S. LaSalle St., Suite 1490, Chicago IL 60604-1103 (312.456.0600), [www.voices4kids.org](http://www.voices4kids.org).

**Illinois Association of Court Appointed Special Advocates**

7501 N. University, Ste. 217B, Peoria IL, 61604 (309.683.8788), [www.illinoiscasa.org](http://www.illinoiscasa.org)