SB238: EARLY CHILDHOOD BLOCK GRANT (ECBG) CLEANUP LANGUAGE

SB238 – a cleanup bill drafted by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) - modifies the birth-to-3 set-aside language in the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG). The proposed change affords needed flexibility to the agency while ensuring the state continues to prioritize funding for programs serving at-risk infants and toddlers.

Why Birth-to-3?

- A child’s brain develops rapidly from birth to age 3. Research shows that for children to enter our public school system with the skills, abilities, and support needed to succeed, we must start early by investing in programs that begin the moment a child is born.
- The ECBG supports a continuum of services for young children. A share of these funds is designated exclusively for programs serving at-risk families with children from birth to age 3, in either evidence-based home-visiting programs or other high-quality infant-toddler child care settings. Known as the Prevention Initiative (PI) program, these services foster healthy development and prepare our youngest kids for academic and social success.

The ECBG Set-Aside “Ramp”

- Recognizing the importance of learning during the first three years of life, current law requires that no less than 14% of the total ECBG allocation must fund the PI program; the law also puts into place a ramp to move that funding to 20% by FY16.
- Between FY09 and FY15, the ECBG was cut by over $80 million. Because the law ensures funding for preschool programs will not be reduced in order to increase the infant-toddler budget, spending on 0-3 services remained around 14%.
- With the signing of the FY16 education budget came a $20.8 million increase to the ECBG. This appropriation triggered the ramp. Without a statutory change, ISBE would need to spend its entire ECBG increase on these infant-toddler programs.

What Does SB238 Accomplish?

- ISBE still believes at least 20 percent of the ECBG allocation should be used to fund services for infants and toddlers. But because the FY16 deadline would force the agency to put the full $20m ECBG increase towards the PI program, the language needs updating.
- To provide needed flexibility, **SB238 would require ISBE to direct a smaller percentage (25%) of any additional ECBG funding above the previous year’s allocation to the PI program until the agency hits its 20% goal.**

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