



**Children's Advocates
for Change**

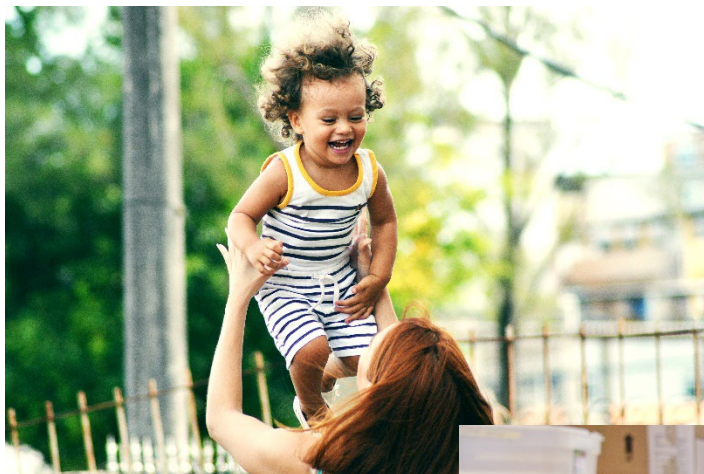
2022 Annual Report



December 2022

CAFC Mission Statement

Children's Advocates for Change is an independent advocacy organization committed to the well-being of every Illinois child. We champion those policies and investments children need so that they are educated, healthy, and thriving.



During the year 2022, children and families across Illinois tried to return to some semblance of normalcy since the onset of COVID-19, but they were frequently slowed by resurgent bouts of the virus and its variants as well as high inflation. Increasing rents and increasing food costs still marked the last quarter of the year at the same time many of the economic relief measures provided by the federal government and the state of Illinois began to run out.

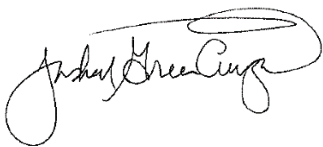
Children's Advocates for Change recognizes the implications of economic instability on our children's health, education, and safety at home. In some cases, the conditions experienced by them was an amplification of underlying racial and ethnic disparities that existed prior to the pandemic's outset. In the upcoming year, we will not only need to address our children's short-term needs – whether in economics, health, education, or family and community safety – but also the flaws in the underlying systems that caused racial and ethnic inequities in the first place.

There is also the human toll from the virus. This fall, the National Institutes of Health estimated that one U.S. child lost a parent or caregiver for every four COVID-19 deaths¹. Their lives are forever changed. The Illinois Department of Public Health reports 35,728 deaths and 4,905 probable deaths due to COVID-19 as of December 28, 2022². We need to ensure impacted children have the resources for a stable home life going forward, which includes the provision of mental health services when needed.

Our work this year showed many children in need of mental health services. As we noted in our policy paper on meeting the mental health needs of our youth, school is a natural place to be delivering those services. We look forward to working with member of the Illinois General Assembly in 2023 to see that the funding and personnel are in place for students to access these services.

As always, we appreciate your support. Your efforts not only provide the solid foundation for our organization but one for children across the state.

Thank you.



Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat
President and Board Member



Dr. Gwendolyn Oglesby-Odom
Board Chair



¹ <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/more-140000-us-children-lost-primary-or-secondary-caregiver-due-covid-19-pandemic>

² <https://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/data.html>

Activities

Webinars, presentations, and policy forums.

With the pandemic still ongoing, much of Children's Advocates for Change's (CAFC) outreach occurred remotely. On **September 13, 2022**, CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat joined a panel discussion organized by United Voices for Children on youth needs during the pandemic. During this event, United



Voices for Children presented Dr. Green Cruzat with the Jesse DeWitt Child Advocacy Award. During his lifetime as a United Methodist minister, Bishop DeWitt represented and spoke out for children, youth, and families who did not have a voice. One of his greatest passions was speaking out to educate and inform local churches about legislation and issues impacting the lives of children.

On **September 28, 2022**, Dr. Green Cruzat and Illinois State Representative Camille Y. Lilly participated in a webinar organized by the American Sustainable Business Network (ASBN) on Racial Impact Note Acts. Such statutes – on a state level - allow legislators to inquire of state agencies, boards, and commissions whether pending legislation will eliminate existing racial and inequities or make the situation worse. During the event, the two discussed Illinois' Racial Impact Note Act, the history of its passage, and implications of its enactment. The ASBN invited Dr. Green Cruzat to make another presentation on Racial Impact Note Acts at its national convention in November.



CAFC Vice-President for Public Policy, Mitch Lifson, made two presentations in Elgin on childhood poverty. The first presentation occurred at an event held on **May 17, 2022**, by the Elgin Partnership for Early Learning. The second presentation occurred at an event held on **October 20, 2022**, by Women on the Brink – a committee of individuals and representatives from different community organizations including the Elgin League of Women Voters and the local chapter of the American Association of University Women working to empower women to break through the barriers of poverty. The focus of this event was poverty's impact on education.

Helen R. Weigle Policy Forums

The late Helen R. Weigle was a tireless advocate for children. She taught for ten years in Chicago Public High Schools, chaired the former Illinois Commission on Children, was responsible for the development of a statewide study on Child Protective Services, and helped co-found an Illinois children's advocacy organization. Her daughters, Alice W. Kraus and Babs W. Maltenfort, have been very supportive of Children's Advocates for Change and provided the seed money for CAFC to organize and host three online public policy forums in the fall of 2022. Additional sponsors of the events included NICOR Gas, Johnson and Johnson, the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, and Northwestern Medical.

The first forum was held on **September 14, 2022**, and looked at the mental health needs of youth. Dr. Green Cruzat moderated a panel discussion that included Daniel H. Gillison, Jr., CEO of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Dr. Dana Weiner, Illinois' Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Director, and Dr. Mashana Smith, Illinois REACH Project Director. The discussion centered on the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of youth, the increasing need among youth for mental health services even before the pandemic, and other factors impacting youth mental health that include poverty, violence, and negative social media messages. This event had 200 registrants.



The second forum was held on **December 9, 2022**, and examined racial and ethnic disparities in maternal health and mortality. Dr. Green Cruzat moderated a panel discussion that included Vernice Davis Anthony (former Director of the Michigan Department of Public Health), Dr. Kylea Laina Liese, of the University of Illinois Chicago (whose current research focuses on health system structures and obstetric racism), and Lorel G. Mayer Neal (a Certified Nurse Midwife). Among the topics discussed were the roles of community health workers and birthing centers. The event had 83 registrants.

The third and final forum was held on **December 15, 2022**, and considered family economic supports. Mitch Lifson provided an overview of the federal child tax credit and statistics on inequities in household income by race and ethnicity. Dr. Green Cruzat then led a panel discussion with Dr. Valerie Wilson of the Economic Policy Institute, Dr. Christopher Wimer of Columbia University, and Illinois State Senator Elgie R. Sims, Jr. The discussion looked at some of the reasons for variations in household income, the impact of the 2021 enhanced federal child tax credit, state child tax credits, and consideration of a state income tax credit for renters. The event had 78 registrants.



Policy Work

Policy Paper on Youth Mental Health Needs

During 2022, Sarah Stolarski-Galla (CAFC Intern at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work), CAFC Helen R. Weigle Fellow Lillian Platten, Mitch Lifson and Dr. Green Cruzat dove into the statistics on youth mental health needs, surveyed Illinois school social workers, and held a round of discussions with more than 75 students in the Quad Cities, East St. Louis, Chicago, and Northfield. The result was a policy paper on the subject released in **September 2022**.

Of the 76 school social workers completing a self-reporting survey, almost 82% of school social workers indicated there were barriers to students receiving mental health services at the school employing the social worker.

A number of students also expressed a similar concern. One student noted:

“Many people find it hard to access the help because they have to go out of their way just to ask/receive it and when they do they only get it on certain days.”



CAFC Intern Sarah Stolarski-Galla talking to Chicago youth about mental health needs.

Other students said racism and homophobia were two of the top issues they felt were problems within the schools.

The paper concluded with five recommendations for Illinois lawmakers to consider that include conducting regular mental health assessments for students, establishing and expanding school-based health resources with additional staff and telehealth, adopting a state child income tax credit, and enhancing mental health literacy training and/or mental health first aid programs for educators and parents through Illinois school districts.

Legislative Activity

As the Illinois General Assembly's spring legislative session got underway in January 2022, CAFC ramped up its advocacy efforts in other areas. Despite enhanced federal unemployment benefits, and the noted federal child tax credit increase, many families across the state of Illinois continue to struggle with the economic fallout of the pandemic. Chief among those factors is the ability to pay rent.

Illinois currently has an income tax credit available to homeowners worth 5% of real estate taxes paid on a principal residence. However, no such companion credit exists for renters. Working with State Representative Michael Zalewski, CAFC had a legislative measure drafted and introduced (HB 5082). The measure creates an income tax credit for taxpayers of 5% of documented rental costs for a dwelling used by the taxpayer as a principal place of residence. To qualify, a taxpayer must have lived in Illinois for at least half the year, have federal adjusted gross income at or below 200% of the federal poverty

level, and rental payments must exceed 30% of the taxpayer's federal adjusted gross income³.

While held in the House Rules Committee, Mitch Lifson did testify on the bill at a **March 10, 2022**, subject matter hearing of the House Revenue and Finance Committee. CAFC staff has also been in Springfield, talking to legislators about the initiative.



On March 16, 2022, Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat joined State Representative Carol Ammons in testifying in support of SB 3845. The legislation requires the state's Gender Equity Advisory Committee to submit recommendations on how the state and school districts can better support historically disadvantaged males to ensure educational equity. (State Senator Adriane Johnson sponsored the bill in the Senate.)

Federal Child Tax Credit

Combined with other federal COVID-19 relief measures, 2021 enhancements to the federal child tax credit (CTC) cut the nation's child poverty rate by nearly half. Yet, the changes Congress enacted lasted for only one year.

Towards the end of 2022, CAFC worked with the Coalition on Human Needs in drafting a letter to U.S. Senators Richard Durbin and Tammy Duckworth urging them to again expand both the federal CTC and earned income tax credit. CAFC then secured the commitments of 18 other human service and child advocacy organizations to sign on to the letter. CAFC forwarded the letters to Senators Durbin and Duckworth and urged its supporters to contact the federal House and Senate leadership. Public News Service ran a story quoting Mitch Lifson on how the enhanced federal credit helped lift thousands of Illinois children out of poverty. Other Illinois news outlets picked up the story.

Unfortunately, the federal budget agreement for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2023 did not include enhancements to the federal CTC. This remains an issue CAFC will continue to work on along with urging state lawmakers to adopt a state CTC.

Illinois Child Advocates Demand Action on Renewing Child Tax Credit



Under the Supplemental Child Tax Credit, the number of American children living in poverty in 2021 dropped by 40% (Theodo)

Mark Richardson, Producer
Contact

Why you can trust Public News Service

Thursday, December 8, 2022

As Congress moves toward its deadline to pass a new budget, social advocates are urging lawmakers to reinstate the **Enhanced Child Tax Credit** for next year.

In 2021, the American Rescue Plan shifted the program from a tax reimbursement to direct monthly payments of as much as \$3,600 dollars per child. The move cut the child poverty rate almost in half, but when lawmakers failed to renew the program for 2022, many families fell back below the poverty line.

Mitch Lifson, vice president for public policy at the Chicago-based Children's Advocates for Change, said there is ample evidence the direct tax payments uplifted families and stimulated the economy.

"If you compare the numbers of children under the age of 18, there were \$5,000 fewer in poverty, and that's a 30% reduction," Lifson explained. "There's no question that it has had a benefit to children in the state of Illinois, as well as across the country."

³ There was an amendment drafted to HB 5082 to make a technical correction to this last provision.

Youth Public Policy Leadership Program

CAFC continued its Youth Public Policy Leadership Program in 2022. Teaming up with Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School on Chicago's west side, staff trained 77 high school students in communication and advocacy skills.

The goal of the program is to encourage civic involvement and provide students in underserved communities with the skills to become effective spokespeople for their neighborhoods. In a set of training sessions, program participants have the chance to identify issues of importance to them and their communities, learn the advocacy and communication skills, practice advocating for an issue with staff, and make the case for a policy change directly to elected officials -with those elected officials providing feedback on not just the content of the "ask" but also the overall presentation itself.

CAFC surveys students at the start of the training sessions and at their conclusion. Of the fall program participants, here are the survey results from two of the questions CAFC asked of students.

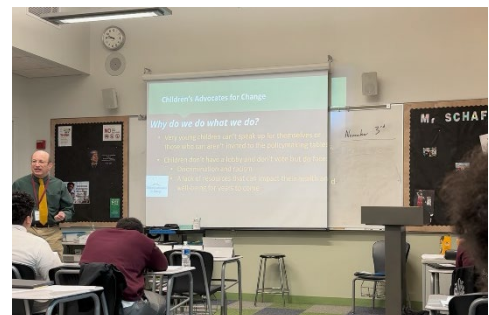
December 2022 survey results	Before	After
I feel prepared to advocate to elected officials	67%	94%
I know what I can do to help make my community a better place	73%	92%



CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat during a spring training session.



December 2022, CTK students make their cases on public policy issues to elected officials and their representatives.



CAFC Vice-President for Public Policy Mitch Lifson during a fall training session.

Children's Advocates for Change Board Members:



- Dr. Gwendolyn Oglesby-Odom, Chair
- Jill Fraggos, Vice-Chair
- Jennifer Jones, Treasurer
- Dr. Ramona Burress, Secretary
- Dr. Teresa Cordova
- Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat, Board Member and Organization President
- Christa Markgraff
- Mark Payne

Thank you!

Children's Advocates for Change (CAFC) gratefully acknowledges those foundations and entities that made a major financial commitment to our work in 2022 including the Chicago Community Trust, Anne E. Casey Foundation, Helen and Maurice Weigle Fund, Nicor Gas Foundation, and Alice W. Krause and Babs W. Maltenfort Fund.

We also wish to thank our community partners:

- The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work
- Christ the King Jesuit College Prep
- United Voices for Children

Thanks also to our many advocacy partners who are part of the numerous coalitions in and out-of-state working to improve the lives of children and their families.



CAFC Supporters Justin and Abby Staples

You can help support our efforts by donating at
<https://childrensadvocates.org/donate/>

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