



**Children's Advocates
for Change**

2023 Annual Report



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.

Just some of our supporters across the state:



Message from the President



During the course of 2023, the U.S. inflation rate steadily declined. However, the decrease was not met with a commensurate decline in food prices. According to the federal government, food prices increased by 5.8%, which came on top of a 2022 increase of 9.9%.

So, it is not surprising that while the country’s unemployment rate was below 4% many Illinois families still faced issues of food insecurity in 2023. A U.S. Census Bureau survey conducted last October documented that for Illinois households with children responding to a question on food security nearly 18% indicated they often or sometimes did not have enough food to eat in the last 7 days. For Black Illinois households with children surveyed, that number jumped to almost 43%.

Illinois families need additional financial support to purchase food and meet other basic household needs. During 2023, Children’s Advocates for Change advocated for the creation of a refundable state child tax credit. While the Illinois legislature did not enact the credit, our organization will continue to champion the cause in 2024.

It is just one of our many efforts to meet the needs of our children and lift up their voices and stories. Our thanks goes out to everyone who supported us during 2023. Join us in our advocacy this year as we continue our work to see that all children have the resources they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat
President and Board Member
Children’s Advocates for Change

Advocacy and Legislation

The start of the year brought with it the opening of a new Illinois General Assembly and Children’s Advocates for Change’s 2023 Legislative Agenda.



There were four major legislative initiatives CAFC undertook to promote equity and continue providing low- and moderate-income families needed economic supports. CAFC helped draft each piece of legislation referenced below and sought out sponsors for the bills.

Equity

Equity Budgeting (HB 3748 -Re-referred to Rules Committee)

HB 3748 requires the governor to include a specific section in any proposed state budget that covers how the budget promotes racial and ethnic equity within the state. The use of a race equity lens during budget deliberations points out the racial and ethnic disparities that continue to plague us, raises the questions of why those disparities exist, and prompts the question of how the state – through the provision of goods and services – is addressing those inequities.

Training on Producing Racial Impact Notes (HB 3941 - Re-referred to Rules Committee)

A key element to equity, is also utilizing the state’s Racial Impact Note Act (25 ILCS 83). The Act allows a legislator to request a state agency to prepare a statement or note of a reliable estimate on how pending legislation could affect racial and ethnic minorities likely to be impacted by the bill.

HB 3941 requires the Governor’s office to submit a report by year’s end on recommendations regarding the production of racial impact notes that would examine methodology, formatting, and a course of training for personnel required to produce such notes. This measure should improve the quality and effectiveness of the produced notes.

Economic Opportunity

State Child Tax Credit (SB 1444 - Re-referred to Assignments; HB 3950 - Re-referred to Rules Committee)



CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat, pictured far left, in Springfield following a visit with State Senator Elgie Sims Jr. Joining her were United Voices for Children President Rev. Timothy Biel, Jr. Carlos Green, and CAFC Vice-President for Public Policy Mitch Lifson.

To help these working families, Illinois needs to adopt a state child tax credit. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 12 states have enacted state child tax credits. In nine of the 12 states, the credit is refundable. Such a credit helps Illinois families meet basic household needs and adds greater progressivity into the state’s tax system.

Renter’s Income Tax Credit (SB 1836 - Re-referred to Assignments; HB 2429 - Referred to Rules Committee)

U.S. Census Data clearly shows that a far greater percentage of lower-income households pay more than 30% of their income on rent versus higher-income households. A far higher percentage of Illinois Blacks rent versus owning housing units (61% of Blacks rent versus 25% of non-Latinx whites)¹. Yet, the state’s property tax credit benefits homeowners.

¹ 2019 5-year American Community Survey Data, U.S. Census Bureau

This legislation creates a state income tax credit for renters. The credit would be worth 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 income.



Mitch Lifson, pictured far left, at a Springfield news conference promoting a state child tax credit.

CAFC produced fact sheets on our legislative measures, which CAFC Vice-President for Public Policy Mitch Lifson distributed to lawmakers, administration officials, and our advocacy partners. CAFC also advocated for increased appropriations for children’s mental health and maternal and infant health.

Mitch was in Springfield frequently during the spring session working with a 40-member coalition that included the Economic Security Project, the Shriver Center, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and others to advocate for a state child tax credit. He made more than 40 direct visits to legislators, legislative staff, and administration staff to outline the benefits of the credit to Illinois working families.

With mounting budget pressures in other areas and reduced revenue estimates, the effort to establish a state child tax credit, as well as that for an income tax credit for renters, fell short. However, the child tax credit proposal generated a fair amount of conversation within the legislative caucuses and hopefully set the stage for passage of the measure in the future.

Mitch, along with the president of one of our advocacy partners – United Voices for Children, also testified before the Senate Revenue Committee regarding an income tax credit for renters. CAFC also continued its work with members of the Quality Alliance – a coalition of numerous organizations across the state of Illinois involved in promoting access to high-quality early childhood education and care - in supporting the Governor’s proposal for additional investments in early childhood education and care.

CAFC will use the fall to continue visiting with legislators and other policymakers to discuss the benefits of our proposed measures as well as increase membership in the coalition working for a state child tax credit.

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Equity Budgeting - HB 3748 **Representative Harper**

HB 3748 requires the Governor to provide an explanation within the proposed fiscal year budget presented to the General Assembly (starting with FY25) of the budget’s provisions further the Governor’s effort to ensure equity. The bill also requires the Governor’s Office of Management and Budget to detail in its annual economic and fiscal policy report how the most recently adopted budget has addressed equity.

While the Governor’s proposed budget may explain how a particular agency line items or program promotes equity, HB 3748 ties together agency, board, and commission expenditures for a broader picture of how the state budget overall helps reduce racial and ethnic inequalities within the state.

In 2022, lawmakers in Connecticut approved a similar provision. The City of Minneapolis provides an analysis of equity impact into its annual budget process. Other local governments also utilize an equity review in their budgeting.

Defining equity
HB 3748 defines equity as the “efforts, regulations, policies, programs, standards, processes and any other functions of government or principles of law and governance intended to:”

- (1) identify and remedy past and present patterns of discrimination or inequality and disparities in outcome;
- (2) ensure that such patterns of discrimination, inequality, and disparities in outcome, whether intentional or unintentional, are neither reinforced nor perpetuated; and
- (3) prevent the emergence and persistence of foreseeable future patterns of discrimination against or disparities in outcome against minority persons as defined by Section 2 of the Business Enterprise for Minorities, Women, and Persons with Disabilities Act.

Current reporting requirements
State statute already requires the State Board of Education and various state agencies to collect and report to the General Assembly the racial, ethnic, age, sex, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and primary or preferred language demographics of program participants for each major program administered by the Board or the Department. Not only should this data assist the Governor’s office in preparing the budget equity statement but HB 3748 also requires the Board and agencies covered by the data collection requirement to file an annual report to the General Assembly containing an analysis of how the most recently adopted State budget promotes equity.

Widening opportunities
Whether it is with regards to measures to reduce poverty, improve educational programs, provide more economic opportunities or expand healthcare services, an overview and discussion of how a proposed state budget promotes equity helps shine a spotlight on the challenges before the state and the opportunities to develop or enhance state services allow every individual within the state to thrive.

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“Assuring equity is a key consideration when making recommendations to the legislature about how to allocate resources,” Gov. Ned Lamont’s budget spokesman, Chris Collibee, said. “This provision will keep future administrations accountable for this important set of considerations.”

Who Supports an Illinois Child Tax Credit?

SB 1448
HB 3999

LEGISLATIVE SPONSORS

SENATE	HOUSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapman Simms Carvantes Koehler Prosser Johnson Ventura Ely-Jaffer Quante Gillespie Vila Fine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapman Simms Mohler Mah Lifson Raslic Mason Sveit B. Hernandez Gasik Morgan Chical Freer-Olds Noss

ILLINOIS COST-OF-LIVING REFUND COALITION

The Illinois Cost-of-Living Refund Coalition is dedicated to making Illinois’ tax system more equitable and inclusive so every family can thrive.

Run by Economic Security Project, our members are composed of 40+ unions, community organizations, consumer protection groups, and nonprofits.

Our members are:

- Age Credit
- AARP Illinois
- Center Access Communities
- The Chicago Community Trust
- Chicago Jobs Council
- Chicago Urban League
- Chicago Votes
- Children’s Advocates for Change
- Children’s Home & Aid
- Community Organizing & Family Issues
- Economic Security for Illinois
- Economic Security Project
- Equity and Transformation
- Grassroots Collaborative
- Heartland Alliance
- Hispanic Federation
- Illinois Action for Children
- Illinois Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights
- Illinois Families for Public Schools
- Illinois Nurses Association
- Illinois Public Interest Research Group
- Latino Policy Forum
- LIFT-Chicago
- Metropolitan Planning Council
- New America Chicago
- Parents Organizing to Win Educate & Renew - Policy Action Council Illinois
- Raise The Floor Alliance
- SEIU - HCL
- SEIU - Local 1
- SEIU - Local 73
- Shriver Center on Poverty Law
- Small Business Majority
- Stand for Children Illinois
- Start Early
- UICW - Local 881
- United Way of Illinois
- UpTogether
- Warehouse Workers for Justice
- Women Employed
- Woodstock Institute
- Worker Center for Racial Justice
- Young Inhabitants
- YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago

Newsletters, Blog Posts, and Podcasts

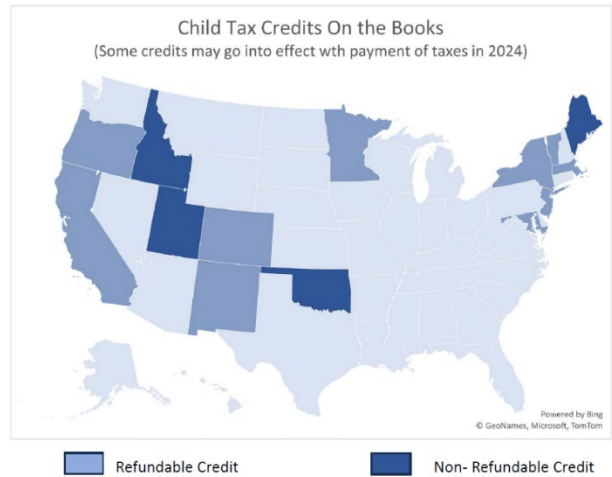
During the legislative session, CAFC also produced a blog post examining the Governor’s proposed Fiscal Year 2023 budget. Our Spring 2023 Newsletter also contained information on funding items impacting children and families that are contained in the budget approved by the Illinois General Assembly. (CAFC sends out quarterly newsletters to an email list of approximately 11,000 individuals.)

The organization has also placed on its website blog posts regarding:

- Child Poverty and Household Income Needed for Basic Needs
- The Case for a State Child Tax Credit
- States That Have Enacted Child Tax Credits

CAFC also produced and posted on its website three podcasts regarding child tax credits.

- In the first podcast, CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat and CAFC Vice-President for Public Policy Mitch Lifson talk about changes in the federal child tax credit and efforts to establish an Illinois child tax credit.
- In the second podcast, Tasha and Mitch chat with Neva Butkus, a state policy analyst for the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, about activity on child tax credits in states across the country.
- In the third podcast, Tasha speaks with U.S. Representative Suzan DelBene on her efforts to increase the federal child tax credit permanently.



Lake County
Total Population 714,484
Total Population Under 18 172,427

[AIAN = American Indian/Alaska Native; NHOPI=Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander]
***** A margin of error is not appropriate because the corresponding estimate is controlled to an independent population or housing estimate. Effectively, the corresponding estimate has no sampling error and the margin of error may be treated as zero.

Group or race	Population	Margin of error
AIAN under 18	1,211	±296
Asian under 18	14,040	±547
Black under 18	12,856	±715
Latins under 18	54,923	*****
Multiracial under 18	19,811	±1,245
NHOPI under 18	99	±69
Other under 18	16,363	±1,059
White, non-Latins under 18	82,044	±1,171

The U.S. Census Bureau asks questions of race and ethnicity separately. Thus, the total of the individual categories may be higher than the "Total Population Under 18" figure.

Unemployment Rate 5.5% Labor Force Participation 68.4%
Of all SNAP recipients, % that are under 18 54.3%
Of all under 18 Households, % on SNAP 13.0% Of all Households, % under 18 on SNAP 4.6%

Median Household Income \$97,127
2021 Poverty Rate (All ages) 5117,633
7.6%

2021 Poverty Rate (Children)	2017 Poverty Rate (Children)
10.3%	11.5%
2021 Poverty Rate (AIAN Children) 10.8%	2017 Poverty Rate (AIAN Children) 8.3%
2021 Poverty Rate (Asian Children) 3.4%	2017 Poverty Rate (Asian Children) 4.4%
2021 Poverty Rate (Black Children) 32.8%	2017 Poverty Rate (Black Children) 35.0%
2021 Poverty Rate (Latinx Children) 17.3%	2017 Poverty Rate (Latinx Children) 20.3%
2021 Poverty Rate (Multiracial Children) 13.3%	2017 Poverty Rate (Multiracial Children) 10.3%
2021 Poverty Rate (NHOPI Children) 0.0%	2017 Poverty Rate (NHOPI Children) 0.0%
2021 Poverty Rate (Other Children) 22.1%	2017 Poverty Rate (Other Children) 20.7%
2021 Poverty Rate (white/ non-Latins Children) 3.1%	2017 Poverty Rate (white, non-Latins Children) 4.2%

% Public/Charter School Students who are Low Income 48.5 % Children on Public Health Coverage 28.3%
% Public/Charter School Students who are Homeless 4.3 % Children Uninsured 3.0%
% 3 to 4-year-olds enrolled in school 50.8% Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 births) 5
% with a Bachelor's Degree or higher, aged 25 and over 46.3%

Median Monthly Housing Costs (Dollars) \$1,597
% Rent Burdened 43%

% Rent Burdened within Each Income Range (High or Low numbers may be reflective of a combination of county sampling size, housing costs, and income levels.)

Income Range	% Rent Burdened
Less than \$20,000	88.0%
\$20,000-\$4,999	89.1%
\$5,000-\$9,999	64.0%
\$10,000-\$14,999	33.6%
\$15,000-\$24,999	7.9%
\$25,000 or more	5.9%

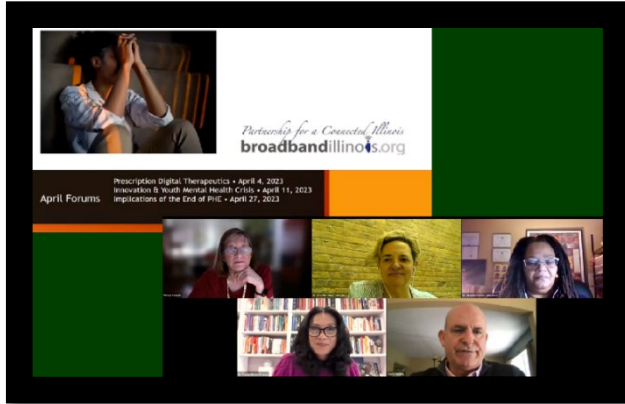
Residential Vacancy Rate 5.9%

www.childrensadvocates.org

Data Analysis

With the assistance of our spring Helen R. Weigle Fellow Fran Delacey, CAFC produced a set of county fact sheets (102 counties plus a composite state fact sheet, all of which are posted on our website) that look at child poverty levels, health metrics, and family housing costs. CAFC staff pulled and analyzed the data from from the U.S. Census Bureau and state agency reports.

While the state’s unemployment level has improved in the last year, many families still face financial stress in meeting basic household needs. In addition, there are wide disparities in child poverty when the data is viewed by race and ethnicity. The fact sheets will help us in our regional advocacy for the state economic supports outlined above.



Webinars

In April, CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat participated in a panel discussion hosted by broadbandillinois.org and others examining how telehealth can help meet the behavioral health needs for K-12 students. The Partnership for a Connected Illinois is currently planning a pilot of systems to see what model might work best for students as well as parents.

Dr. Green Cruzat also was interviewed on Chicago’s CAN-TV by Andrea Zopp about CAFC and its activities.



Work on Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations

From June through September, CAFC partnered with the Erikson Institute on a research project, funded by the Illinois Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development, to conduct an Equity Analysis of Infant/ Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations. The project was designed to highlight the importance of Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations and understand access to consultations across the state. In addition to CAFC (which received credit in the final report) and the Erikson staff, IECAM (the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map outfit based at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana) participated in the project.




As part of this project, CAFC Vice-President for Public Policy Mitch Lifson provided input on the state’s early childhood systems as it pertains to I/ECMHC as well as guidance on surveys and focus groups and insight on data findings related to the project. This involved weekly meetings to discuss data sources, providing input on early childhood programs run by the state, setting-up meetings with state officials involved in these programs, reviewing IECAM produced maps, and reviewing Erikson draft presentations.

Crain’s Forum Essay on Children’s Mental Health

Dr. Green Cruzat provided a guest essay to a Crain’s Chicago Business Forum on children’s mental health that was published online. In it, she noted the need for Illinois to provide additional resources within schools and community settings to help young people address the mental health challenges they face. The National Survey of Children’s Health estimates that in 2021, nearly 1 in 4 Illinois children aged 3-17 had a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral problem.

CRAIN'S CHICAGO BUSINESS

The National Survey of Children's Health estimates that in 2021, nearly 1 in 4 Illinois children aged 3-17 had a mental, emotional, developmental or behavioral problem. Furthermore, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that in 2021, 30% of female students nationally reported seriously considering attempting suicide in the past 12 months.



Tasha Green Cruzat is president of Children's Advocates for Change.

FORUM

We must prioritize children's mental health and collectively work to set them up for success by providing the necessary resources and support to thrive and have a healthy future. The good news is that Illinois has not been idle in the face of this crisis. In April of this year, the federal government approved a state proposal to bring additional federal matching funds to cover school-based health services for Medicaid-enrolled students. This past August, the state announced it was accepting grant applications from schools and agencies for a portion of a \$10 million federal grant

Youth Public Policy Leadership Program

CAFC continued its Youth Public Policy Leadership Program during the spring with the training of 37 student at Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School on Chicago’s west side and 14 students at Walter Payton College Preparatory High School (a Chicago public high school). With the program, these young people have the chance to make public policy proposals directly to elected officials following a set of training sessions by CAFC staff.

Among those elected officials, staff representing elected officials, and other policymakers joining us this spring were:



State Representative Camille Lilly listens to a student presentation.

State Representative Margaret Croke, State Representative Camille Y. Lilly, Chicago Alderman Jason C. Ervin, Congressman Danny Davis' Office Chief of Staff Tumia Romero , Erica Bland-Durosinmi (who at the time she joined us was serving as an intergovernmental affairs advisor to then Chicago Mayor-elect Brandon Johnson), John Mirkovic and Ed Michalowski from Cook County Clerk Karen Yarbrough's Office, and Lurie Children's Hospital Vice-President of Government Relations Jill Fraggos (who also serves as a CAFC Board Member). CAFC was honored to have these individuals join us as well as have the opportunity to work with the students on communications and advocacy skills.

Following their training, two Walter Payton students recorded comments broadcast at a meeting of the state’s Youth Budget Commission.

CAFC plans to continue the program this fall and, contingent on funding, work with students in underserved communities outside of Chicago.



John Mirkovic and students discuss tactics for presenting public policy proposals to elected officials.



Chicago Alderman Jason C. Ervin critiques student presentations.



State Representative Margaret Croke, pictured to the right, listens to student presentations at Walter Payton College Preparatory High School.

Local Exchanges

We know the data we collect and analyze for our advocacy work doesn't tell the whole story. That is why we are establishing a set of community councils we call "local exchanges".

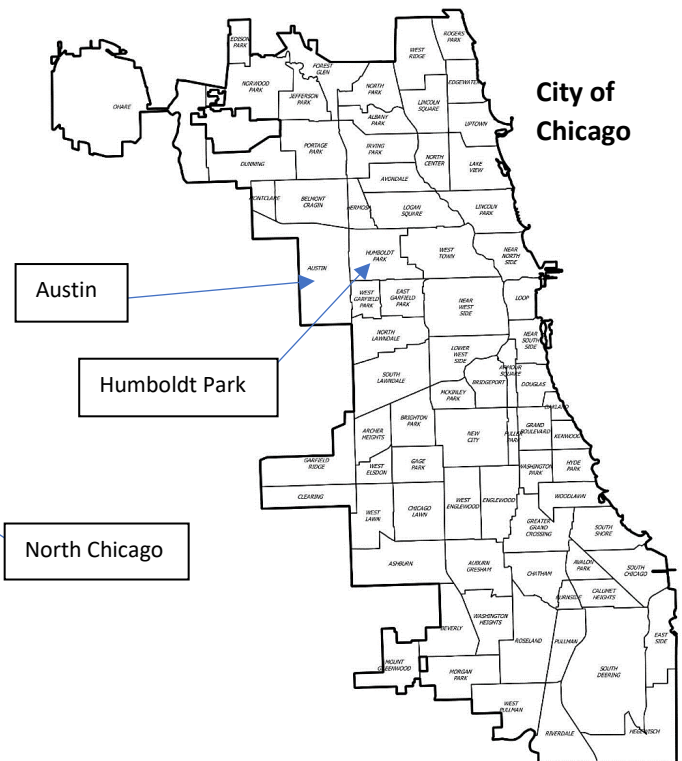
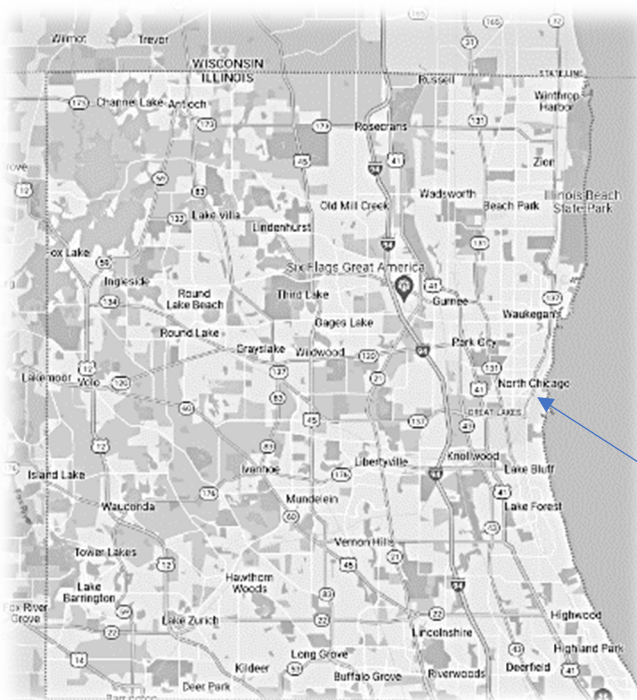
Through these councils, which we envision to be 10-12 community residents and stakeholders, we look to gather the real-life situations children and their families face – whether it is with regards to housing, community safety, availability of fresh fruits and vegetables or other matters – and work with the community members to develop practical policy proposals to address these situations. We also want to use the forum to tell participants about the latest developments in Springfield and Washington D.C. that could have an impact on their communities. In short, we want the venues to be just as the name implies, an exchange of ideas and information.



CAFC Vice-President for Public Policy Mitch Lifson at a September meeting of the Austin CAFC Local Exchange.

Our first local exchange, in Chicago's Austin neighborhood met in September. CAFC is organizing a second local exchange in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood. That will be followed by a local exchange in North Chicago.

Local Exchange Sites



Partnership with United Voices for Children

We are pleased to be working again this year with United Voices for Children in joint advocacy efforts on behalf of children. (United Voices for Children is a coalition of groups and individuals within the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church dedicated to speaking and acting on behalf of children, youth and their families who lack the voice of an advocate.) CAFC Vice-President for Public Policy Mitch Lifson meets regularly with the UVC Board to update them on policy issues impacting children. As noted earlier, Mitch and UVC President Reverend Timothy Biel testified earlier this year before the Illinois Senate Revenue Committee on legislation to establish an income tax credit for renters, and Mitch led a discussion at UVC’s Bridging the Gap Fundraiser earlier this year on what representatives of churches and child-serving organizations were seeing in their communities.



CAFC Vice-President for Public Policy Mitch Lifson leading a conversation at United Voices for Children’s “Raising Our Voices” event earlier this year.

New Board of Directors Chair



CAFC celebrates the new appointment of Mark Payne to the Chair of CAFC’s Board of Directors. Along with chairing the Board, Mark is the Executive Director of Public Allies – Chicago. Mark has 20 years of experience in government and community relations, economic development, and youth development. His professional background includes serving as the Principal of SOW SOLUTIONS LLC., Executive Director of CeaseFire Illinois, Deputy Director for the Chicago Police Department’s Superintendent’s Office, and General Manager for government and community relations at the Chicago Transit Authority. Mark has also been a fellow with the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Thank You to Our Contributors!

CAFC gratefully acknowledges those foundations and entities that made a major financial commitment to our work in 2023 including:

- The Chicago Community Trust
- The Anne E. Casey Foundation
- The Deaconess Foundation
- The Helen and Maurice Weigle Fund
- The Alice W. Krause and Babs W. Maltenfort Fund
- The Chicago Temple Fund
- The Francis Beidler Foundation

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