



Children's Advocates
for Change

2024 Annual Report



December 2024

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.

A Message from Children's Advocates for Change President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat



As I write to you, our country has just concluded a bitterly fought election with underlying tones of who and who is not entitled to government assistance. Children's Advocates for Change is dedicated to seeing that all children, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or geography, are entitled to needed health care, education, and economic support so that every child will thrive in life.

How to fund and deliver those services will be some of the great challenges in 2025. Prior to election day, the Illinois Governor's Office of Management and Budget issued a fiscal forecast that projected a state deficit of nearly \$3.2 billion in the upcoming fiscal year (starting July 1, 2025). That is not even considering potential federal cuts to programs and services to offset lost revenue from proposed federal tax cuts. Already, the Governor's office has asked agency personnel to identify programs where funding increased in recent years and make suggestions for spending reductions.

In the last several years, Illinois has made great strides in providing new funding for early childhood services as well as additional funding for the K-12 school system to promote greater equity and opportunity. Illinois needs to maintain a high bar when it comes to providing needed services for our children. If more revenue is needed to support those efforts, then we need to look at possible avenues to raise those funds.

Children's Advocates for Change will be relentless in its commitment to maintaining these services as well as securing the funding for still needed programs to see that all families have secure housing, are food secure, and in safe and loving environments. We thank our supporters who have been on this journey with us and welcome others to the fight.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tasha Green Cruzat". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

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

State Child Tax Credit

Children’s Advocates for Change (CAFC) entered the 2024 Illinois legislative session with an agenda of several items but one main goal – pass a state Child Tax Credit. It was clear at the outset that we would face headwinds. The state’s revenue picture looked bleak with a projected budget hole of close to \$900 million and demands were increasing for a range of services. However, we were also aware of the challenges low-income families faced before the pandemic and how they had only increased with rising rents and food prices.

In the end, we won!

CAFC staff spend a great deal of time in Springfield advocating for the tax credit. Along with our coalition partners, we secured 40 House sponsors and 28 Senate sponsors on the legislation creating a state Child Tax Credit and met with dozens of other legislators urging them to support the bills. Aware the House Democratic Leadership was polling members on budget priorities early in the session, CAFC produced a letter to caucus members requesting they list a state Child Tax Credit in their budget priorities to leadership.



CAFC VP of Public Policy, pictured far right, joins State Senator Omar Aquino and others in support of a state Child Tax Credit.

In a series of blog posts, we reiterated the regressive nature of our tax system and how a state Child Tax Credit can make it more progressive. <https://childrensadvocates.org/illinois-tax-system-widening-inequality/>. We reviewed the impact poverty can have on child maltreatment <https://childrensadvocates.org/economic-supports-and-child-maltreatment/> and on a child’s health <https://childrensadvocates.org/how-a-child-tax-credit-can-improve-childrens-health/>. Staff provided a summary of these blog posts as well as data on existing state Child Tax Credits to the chief budget negotiators in the House and Senate. We also worked with our coalition partners on the production of a fact sheet used by coalition members throughout the spring <https://economicsecurity.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ILCTC-Fact-Sheet-4.8.2024-FINAL.pdf>.

Staff made presentations regarding a state Child Tax Credit to several groups online including the Quality Alliance (an Illinois-based group of 40+ child advocacy organizations working to improve access to high-quality early learning and care opportunities for children), the Jewish United Fund’s Early Childhood Task Force, Family Focus and United Voices for Children. (There’s more about our partnership with these last two organizations below.) Staff produced a podcast with the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy on the state’s tax system <https://childrensadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/CAFC-Podcast-State-Tax-Systems.mp3> and participated in a talk show segment regarding the Child Tax Credit effort on Chicago radio station WVON-AM <https://childrensadvocates.org/media/>. An Op-Ed from CAFC

President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat and Family Focus' President regarding the Child Tax Credit was featured in a Champaign, Illinois newspaper <https://childrensadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Champaign-News-Gazette-Op-Ed.pdf> and our work regarding the tax system was featured in a Public News Service story <https://childrensadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Public-News-Service-IL-state-and-local-tax-system.pdf>.

The final credit approved ties it to the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credit. It applies to households with at least one dependent under the age of 12. The Illinois Department of Revenue estimates approximately 374,000 Illinois taxpayers that claimed the state EITC had at least one dependent under the age of 12. (The credit is per taxpayer not per child.) Therefore, with an average of two children per household (according to the Census Bureau) we have put the number of children impacted at 784,000.

The Governor's budget office estimates the cost to the state of the new Child Tax Credit will be \$50 million in Tax Year 2024 and \$100 million in Tax Year 2025. Work remains to provide greater resources to extremely low-income families. However, with the creation of the Illinois Child Tax Credit there is now a foundation from which to work on enhancements.

Other legislative achievements

The Child Tax Credit was not our only legislative/advocacy effort. We worked with legislators on advancing a state income tax credit for renters. As part of this effort, we produced a fact sheet detailing the rent burden for low-income families and testified before the Senate Revenue Committee. We also worked with our advocacy partners and coalition members to support further investments in children through the state budget. These include:

- An additional \$50 million dollars to support an additional 392 staff positions at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and rate reform for DCFS providers.
- An additional \$350 million to the state's K-12 evidence based school funding formula to reduce inequities in school district resources.
- An additional \$250 million to early care and education including \$75 million for the state's Early Childhood Block Grant Program, \$36.5 million to handle an anticipated increase in the Child Care Assistance Program, \$100 million for early childhood workforce compensation contracts, and \$5 million for the expansion of the state's home visiting program.
- An additional \$50 million after-school programming.

The News-Gazette

(based in Champaign, Illinois)

Our Turn | An Illinois child tax credit: Good for children, good for business, good for Illinois

TASHA GREEN CRUZAT and DARA MUNSON

May 21, 2024



Tasha Green Cruzat



Dara Munson

Youth Public Policy Leadership Training

This year, CAFC trained another 56 students at Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School on Chicago's west side in communications and advocacy skills as part of our Youth Public Policy Leadership Committee Program.

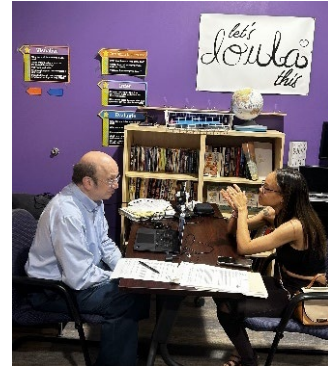
Joining CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat as evaluators of student presentations this year were Cook County Commissioner Tara Stamps, Cook County Clerk Cedric Giles, State Senator- Elect Graciela Guzman, Tim Curry, Eileen Lynch, Travis Moore-Murray, Neoma Nagahawatte, Gerson Ramirez, and Brenda Solorzano.



Partners in Advocacy

CAFC has signed formal agreements with [Family Focus](#) and [United Voices for Children](#) to assist them in policy and advocacy work. CAFC has teamed up with both organizations in the past to call for needed resources for Illinois children and their families.

- Family Focus’ mission is to strengthening families and their children in Chicago and Northeastern Illinois, so they build social capital and achieve upward economic mobility through high-quality innovative programs and services, grounded in anti-racism and social justice. It operates 11 direct service centers throughout Chicago and Northeast Illinois providing holistic family support services to families and children enrolled in center programming, home visits, emergency assistance services, and educational programs. In its 2024 fiscal year, it served more than 21,000 people including 19,000 home visits supporting more than 1,800 children.
- United Voices for Children is a coalition of groups and individuals within the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church. UVC was founded in 1979 and dedicated to speaking and acting on behalf of children, youth and their families who need the voice of an advocate as well as to nurture and support ministries of the Conference. There are more than 300 churches in the Conference representing more than 4,600 children.



CAFC VP of Public Policy Mitch Lifson speaking to a parent at Family Focus' North Lawndale facility about her household finances.



CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat addressing the 2024 Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church.

CAFC VP of Public Policy Mitch Lifson gave a presentation on advocacy and 2024 legislative issues at UVC's Raising Our Voices event in September.



Partnership for America's Children and Economic Analysis Research Network

We continue to be part of two national networks.

- The Partnership for America's Children is a network of 49 state and local child advocacy organizations in 39 states working to improve policies affecting children from birth through adulthood. Like CAFC, the Partnership and its members take a whole-child approach, advocating across multiple issues critical to the well-being of every child and the family that supports them. CAFC's Vice-President of Public Policy Mitch Lifson attended the Partnership's Annual meeting this September in Little Rock, Arkansas.



- The Economic Analysis Research Network (EARN) also held an annual national meeting in September, which CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat joined. EARN is a nationwide network of 56 research, policy, and advocacy organizations in 43 states and the District of Columbia conducting research, providing data analysis, and developing and advocating for policies that prioritize racial and gender equity and address barriers to economic opportunities and benefits.

Children's Defense Fund

In July, CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat and CAFC VP for Public Policy Mitch Lifson made a presentation on the needs of pregnant mothers and young children at Children's Defense Fund's Hall-Proctor Institute in Knoxville, Tennessee. Many of the participants at the meeting represented religious and community institutions around the country.

The Children's Defense Fund advocates for a wide range of policies aimed at protecting and advancing the well-being



of children and youth. Areas of work include education for civic life, family stability and economic mobility, and early learning and development among others.



Child Poverty Forum

Children's Advocates for Change Child Poverty Forum - Part I
September 10, 2024 1:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m.

Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville East St. Louis Center
Wyyvetter H. Young Higher Education Campus
601 James R Thompson Blvd. - Building D, East St. Louis

No child should live in poverty. The child poverty rate in East St. Louis is 48%.

Join us in East St. Louis for a conversation on addressing child poverty in the community and around the state of Illinois. What are the challenges and opportunities?

Featured guest:
Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson
President and CEO of the
Children's Defense Fund

Event moderator:
Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat
President, Children's
Advocates for Change

Other panelists include:
Renee Ryberg - Child Trends
Family Focus President Dana Munson
Erikson Institute President Dr. Mariana Sozzo-Manning
Dr. Safiya McNeese-Ruffin - SSI Adult Family Medicine, Obstetrics & Women's Health
Linda Joiner - East Side Health District
Patrice Howard - SIHF Healthcare
District 148 Supervisor Arthur R. Coker
Stephanie Harling - Birth to Five Illinois: Region 50

Panelists:
Shella Barton - Early Child Education Equity Project
Dr. Tiffany Ghoshan - Breaking Barriers International
Jacki Robinson-Joy - The Northern Trust
Company Board Chair, City Club of Chicago
State Senator Christopher Bell
State Representative Kevin Schmidt
Lieutenant Robert Jennings - Illinois State Police
Ryan Cooke - First Assistant Deputy Governor for
Health and Human Services

Event Sponsors
Alice W. Kraus and Babs W. Maltenfort Fund
Lorraine and Randolph Barba

Attendance is free. Use this QR code to register:

www.childrensadvocates.org

With the Children's Defense Fund President, Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson, as our featured guest, Children's Advocates for Change held a Child Poverty Forum in East St. Louis in September. More than 120 guests, panelists, and speakers attended the event that was held at the Wyyvetter H. Young Higher Education Campus.

At the height of the community growth in the 1950s, the city of East St. Louis had more than 82,000 residents. Today, that population is down to just under 18,800 with a poverty rate of 31.6% (more than double the state poverty rate of 11.8%). The child poverty rate among the city's 3,339 children is even higher: 48.1% (compared to a statewide child poverty rate of 15.9%).

Child poverty can impact a child's health (physical and mental), educational attainment, and future earnings as well as increase the risk of child maltreatment. Maltreated children are at increased risk for behavioral, physical and mental health problems in their adult lives.

CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat served as the event moderator. Along with Rev. Dr. Wilson, our speakers, panelists and moderators included:

- Renee Ryberg - Child Trends, Senior Research Scientist
- Superintendent Arthur R. Culver - East St. Louis School District 189
- Stephanie Herling - Birth to Five Illinois: Region 50, Regional Council Manager
- Sheila Burton - Every Child Education Equity Project, Executive Director
- Dr. Tiffany Gholson - Breaking Barriers International, Founder
- Dara Munson - Family Focus, President
- Dr. Mariana Souto-Manning - Erikson Institute, President
- Dr. Safiya McNeese-Ruffin - Assistant Professor, Associate Program Director of SIU Family Medicine Residency Program - Alton
- Linda Joiner - East Side Health District, Health Education Program Manager
- Patrice Howard - SIHF Healthcare, Senior Vice President
- Jacki Robinson-Ivy - The Northern Trust Company, Senior Vice-President; Board Chair, City Club of Chicago
- State Senator Christopher Belt
- State Representative Kevin Schmidt
- Lieutenant Elbert Jennings - Illinois State Police

East St. Louis residents
commenting on local
needs:

Gloria Hicks



Yolanda Wooten



Mamie Cosie



In his remarks, the Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson noted the success the 2021 enhancement of the federal child tax credit had in reducing child poverty nationally, Rev. Dr. Wilson said that the failure to extend the enhanced credit beyond one year proved “we lack the public will to keep it because we don’t think children deserve to live out of poverty”.



The Rev. Dr. Wilson also talked about the need to restructure the language we use around poverty so as not to stigmatize our children and the need to build a power base to bring about the necessary changes. Our panels covered issues surrounding the impact of poverty on children's health and education.

In discussing academic performance and chronic absenteeism, East St. Louis District 189 Superintendent Arthur R. Culver noted the importance of having quality, “qualified staff that are really connected with kids and believe that they have the ability to learn.”

During a panel discussion featuring elected and appointed officials, panelists discussed—among other issues—bringing the parties from across the city together for the benefit of children. As noted by Illinois State Police Lieutenant Elbert Jennings, “It takes a community to build children.”

Building on the success of creating a state Child Tax Credit, CAFC will continue to work with community members and legislators on additional measures to address child poverty.

Press coverage prior to and after the Child Poverty Forum:

[Capitol News Illinois – East St. Louis forum to tackle persistent childhood poverty](#)

WVON-AM Interview with the Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson [On our website:

<https://childrensadvocates.org/media/>]

[St. Louis Public Radio: East St. Louis forum attendees propose community-driven solutions to child poverty](#)

[Belleville News-Democrat: How does poverty affect students in East St. Louis? Here are 5 things to know.](#)

In November, CAFC returned to East St. Louis for a conversation with a smaller group of community members regarding measures to work on during the Illinois General Assembly’s 2025 Spring Legislative Session.



Contributors and Funders

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- The Chicago Community Trust
- The Chicago Temple Fund
- The Deaconess Foundation
- The Francis Beidler Foundation
- The Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust
- The Helen and Maurice Weigle Fund

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