

## The Ahlquist Center for Policy, Practice, & Innovation at Brightpoint

Brightpoint, formerly Children's Home & Aid, created the Ahlquist Center for Policy, Practice, & Innovation in 2013 as the center of gravity where the agency's practice and strategy experience, insights into innovative programming, and focus on policy and advocacy combine to accelerate change. The Ahlquist Center was established to change policies, systems, and practices to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families in Illinois and to influence change nationally. The Ahlquist Center accomplishes this work through:



- *Advancing state and federal public policies that remove barriers and create opportunities for children and families;*
- *Improving the quality, delivery, and coordination of services – inside and outside of Brightpoint;*
- *Incubating innovative practices that inform public policies.*

## Policy

### Our Policy Mission

Brightpoint advances the well-being of children by investing in families to disrupt the systemic and multi-generational cycle of racial, social, and economic inequality. While we helped create the modern child welfare system, that system has not and will not tackle the root causes of child abuse and neglect. We must recognize poverty and systemic racism are existential threats to child well-being; a threat too often predicted by the zip code where you live or by the color of your skin. Therefore, the Ahlquist Center leads and advocates for robust policies and social supports which are antiracist, equitable, and directed at creating social capital, economic mobility, and systems designed to ensure children, families and communities thrive.

### Legislative Accomplishments

#### Championed

- **Public Act 102-1029: Additional Resources for families in Extended Family Support Program (2022)**  
Written by Brightpoint, this pilot expands the resources available to families caring for their relative children through DCFS' Extended Family Support Program. The new resources include home visiting, parent mentors, and wrap-around case management services. We're excited about this pilot providing the opportunity to invest more in prevention-focused programs to keep children from entering foster care.
- **Public Act 100-0860: Child Care for Young Children Involved in the Child Welfare System (2018)**  
Written by Brightpoint, this act provides families with children ages zero to five and at risk of entering foster care access to free- or low- cost child care through the Child Care Assistance Program while they are in the DCFS Intact Family Services Program. Families retain their access to child care for six months after leaving the Intact program to provide ongoing support.

### Ahlquist Agenda Podcast

**The Ahlquist Agenda**  
with Eric Mayo

The Ahlquist Center for Policy, Practice, and Innovation is the policy and advocacy arm of Brightpoint. In this podcast, we invite you to take an inside look into how we think about policy, why it matters, how it impacts youth, families, and communities in Illinois, and what you can do to help.

**Brightpoint** Strong Families • Thriving Children

- **Public Act 100-0818: Youth Budget Commission and Fiscal Scan (2018)** Written by Brightpoint, this act created a yearly fiscal scan of public funding to services to youth ages eight to 25 and established the Youth Budget Commission to oversee the development of the fiscal scan and to make policy and program recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor.
- #### In Collaboration
- **Public Act 102-0700: Expanded Earned Income Credit (2022)** Permanently expands the Earned Income Credit in Illinois including more Illinoisans in its eligibility and increasing the credit amount to a 20 percent match of the federal credit. Brightpoint worked closely with the Illinois Cost-of-Living Refund Coalition to achieve this monumental change.

# Current Policy and Administrative Advocacy

## • **Head Start Automatic Eligibility for Children in Family Preservation Services**

Research shows that Head Start and Early Head Start programs can be utilized as mechanisms to prevent entrance into foster care for young children. We believe by making children receiving family preservation services through a governmental child welfare agency automatically eligible for Head Start, we will further the developmental growth and well-being of children and strengthen families: keeping children and parents together.

## • **Making Diapers More Affordable for Families**

Brightpoint is championing legislation to make diapers more affordable for families. Diapers are expensive and one in three families in America struggles to afford enough diapers to keep their infants/toddlers clean and healthy. Diapers are also a frequently requested need from families in our programs. We hope to create a diaper allowance to help support families with young children in purchasing diapers.

## • **Child Tax Credit In Illinois**

In collaboration with the Cost-of-Living Refund Coalition, Brightpoint is working to create a state Child Tax Credit to ensure that Illinois is investing in children and families. The federal CTC proved to be an effective tool at significantly decreasing child poverty and, with little movement federally to continue the CTC, we hope to recreate those benefits in Illinois.

# Strategy & Business Development

## Our Strategic Approach

Our Strategy & Business Development team leads the execution of key strategic initiatives, implements, and monitors processes to support organization-wide systems. The team identifies practice improvements that strengthen our services, advance the mission, and furthers progress toward the agency's strategic plan. This team collaborates cross-functionally at all levels of the organization to evaluate needs and incubate solutions and scale best practices.

## Strategic Plan Execution

Over the next five years, Brightpoint will focus on eight strategic priorities to transform the organization and our impact on child & family well-being.



## Motivating Themes

Our Strategic Plan centers around three major themes in alignment with the agency's mission and Blueprint for Impact:



### Prevention

Continued but deliberate shift upstream with an emphasis on prevention



### Family

Recognition and commitment to family as the critical asset for child well-being



### Equity

A more intentional focus on racial and social equity to disrupt the cycle of poverty and child maltreatment

## Sample Projects

- Establishing and facilitating internal Culture & Engagement Activities
- Gathering requirements and implementing the design of a program Service Directory and Referral System
- Supporting the implementation of new program models and gathering of outcome data for reporting

For more information, please contact Ali Schoon, Senior Policy Advocate, [aschoon@brightpoint.org](mailto:aschoon@brightpoint.org)