

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 16, 2026

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Alex J. Adams
Assistant Secretary
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, S.W., Suite 4034
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy and Assistant Secretary Adams,

As members of the Illinois delegation, we write to express extreme alarm at the notification by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to Illinois Governor JB Pritzker on January 6, 2026, that HHS is halting all funding to Illinois for the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in an apparent act of political retaliation against our Governor, alleging unspecified and unsubstantiated potential fraud. In Illinois, this action blocks approximately \$1 billion in funding for essential services that support hundreds of thousands of individuals helped by the three programs with potential to force the closing of child care centers, nonprofits and community-based organizations, child welfare service providers, and small businesses who rely on these funds to assist vulnerable children and families.

Under federal law, the State of Illinois is entitled to receive TANF, SSBG, and CCDF funding, and your letter provided no evidence of any failure on the part of the state. If HHS does have concerns, federal law provides a specific process in each program for it to bring concerns to the state's attention and give the state an opportunity to address them. Federal law outlines penalties if the issues are not resolved and describes in detail the data states must provide to HHS. However, HHS made no attempt to communicate with us or our state or to follow the law regarding alleged operational failures and is now demanding that the state provide them with individual, personally-identifiable information for our constituents that is not required by the law. We demand that you immediately release the funds Congress appropriated to Illinois children and families. If you have concerns about program management, we urge you to follow the process Congress provided in the law to address them.

When there are issues of fraud or misuse of federal funds, we strongly support addressing them, which is why we were very disappointed to hear that you withdrew HHS's demand that

Mississippi pay back misused TANF funds that are currently the subject of criminal prosecutions. The Illinois state agencies operating these three programs maintain strong procedures and protocols to prevent, report, and address alleged fraud, with ongoing reviews and audits of organizations receiving state and federal funding. We also are troubled that HHS has provided no specific evidence or information about alleged fraud and only has halted funds to Democratic-led states that have objected to HHS's actions, which suggest that this unprecedented and unlawful withholding of funds is about politics, not policy.

Your reckless action will do real harm in our state. Together, CCDF, SSBG, and TANF provide critical federal assistance to provide safe, quality child care so low-income parents can work. This funding also helps ensure child care centers are safe and can stay in business to serve families of all income levels, to expand child protection services, and to improve the health and well-being of hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans, including children, seniors, and persons with disabilities. In 2025, Illinois received approximately \$400 million in CCDF funding, which includes both discretionary and guaranteed funding.¹ These funds represent the primary federal assistance to help low-income working families afford quality child care and lifelines to providers and communities. Disruption to this funding will have substantial, immediate, and destructive consequences to Illinois children, families, businesses, and communities.

Further, Illinois and many states rely heavily on TANF to provide child care and child welfare services. Illinois receives approximately \$583 million in TANF, spending approximately \$500 million of Illinois TANF funding on child care.² As the Child Welfare League of America has noted, TANF plays an important role in child welfare given its direct financial aid to families in crisis, support to relative caregivers and wraparound child welfare services, and its potential to reduce child poverty that research documents is a risk factor in abuse and neglect.³ Illinois serves approximately 18,000 children with TANF and has a high percentage of children living with grandparents who receive TANF child-only grants,⁴ often because TANF presents significant barriers for grandparent caregivers. Indeed, almost 50 percent of Illinois children receiving TANF child-only grants live with kinship caregivers.⁵ Withholding both CCDF and TANF funding will cripple child care for low-income families in Illinois, threaten child protection services, and undermine the economic well-being of children and families.

SSBG is a critical source for services for at-risk children, adults and families, covering services such as child welfare, counseling and support, child care, and assistance for the disabled, vulnerable, and elderly. The Child Welfare League of America indicates that "SSBG is the biggest federal source of funding for child abuse prevention and protection."⁶ Illinois receives approximately \$62 million in SSBG to assist approximately 216,000 Illinoisans.⁷ Illinois uses SSBG to support many important social service programs, including: maternal and family health; nutrition and food assistance; family support and prevention; domestic violence

¹ <https://acf.gov/occ/data/gy-2025-ccdf-allocations-based-appropriations>

² <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.nysd.655886/gov.uscourts.nysd.655886.9.1.pdf>

³ https://www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025_HT_SSBG_e.pdf

⁴ https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/fy2023_characteristics.pdf

⁵ https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/fy2023_characteristics.pdf

⁶ https://www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025_HT_SSBG_e.pdf

⁷ <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.nysd.655886/gov.uscourts.nysd.655886.9.1.pdf>

prevention; behavioral health and disability services; employment and self-sufficiency; youth services; corrections and reentry; and aging services.

Given research documenting that economic hardship is a predictor of child welfare involvement, we are profoundly concerned that HHS's action will increase child poverty and increase rates of child welfare involvement and maltreatment. The loss of almost \$1 billion in child care assistance, financial support, counseling, and services will increase material hardship for hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans. Material hardship increases risk for child welfare involvement. If low-income families experience at least one material hardship, they experience three times the likelihood of a child protection investigation and four times higher likelihood of physical abuse investigation.⁸ Among child welfare-involved families receiving public cash benefits, reunification rates are significantly lower for those who lose TANF cash assistance (58 percent) compared to those who continue to receive cash assistance (71 percent).⁹ Similarly, for low-income families with recently closed child-protection investigations, experiencing a negative earnings shock increases the risk of another investigation by 18 percent and the risk of physical abuse by 26 percent; in contrast, each quarter with stable income is associated with a five percent lower risk of investigation.^{10 11} Clearly, the drastic cuts to CCDF, SSBG, and TANF put Illinois children at much greater risk of maltreatment due to an increase in hardship on their families.

In addition to the substantial harm inflicted on vulnerable Illinoisans by halting funds for these three programs, the ACF's action will devastate several hundred nonprofits and small businesses in our state. In Illinois, the TANF block grant supports thousands of licensed child care providers in every county of Illinois, and the SSBG supports 275 organizations statewide.¹² When families cannot afford child care, their parents cannot work, businesses experience instability and loss of employees, and child care providers cannot operate. Child care is an essential component of a thriving economy, and the shortage of affordable child care significantly harms families, businesses, and our economy.¹³ Research indicates that the U.S. economy loses an estimated \$122 billion annually due to child care challenges, with businesses losing approximately \$23 billion annually in revenue and hiring costs due to insufficient child care.¹⁴ Social service organizations also face the threat of economic hardship and closure due to the ACF's cuts. When social service funding is slashed, these essential service providers cannot function, facing mass layoffs and closures.

While we do not believe HHS's data request is intended to identify fraud, we are nevertheless deeply concerned about the agency's ability to even process the data requested while meeting their responsibilities to the American public. The Administration fired thousands of employees at HHS, closed half of the regional offices that manage state TANF and child care programs – including the regional office for Illinois – and eviscerated the federal offices that manage the CCDF, SSBG, and TANF. Even if Illinois could immediately provide all the data demanded, we

⁸ <https://www.chapinHall.org/wp-content/uploads/Economic-Supports-deck.pdf>

⁹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28265225/>

¹⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213421002866?via%3Dihub>

¹¹ <https://www.chapinHall.org/wp-content/uploads/Economic-Supports-deck.pdf>

¹² <https://gov-pritzker-newsroom.prezly.com/governor-pritzker-blasts-trumps-partisan-freeze-to-crucial-child-care-and-family-assistance-programs>

¹³ <https://www.ffyf.org/by-topic/economy-business/>

¹⁴ <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/2038-122-billion-the-growing-annual-cost-of-the-infant-toddler-child-care-crisis>

question whether ACF has qualified staff available to adequately review the information provided, likely resulting in an extended loss of support and services to Illinoisans.

Government has a responsibility to protect its citizens while ensuring appropriate use of federal funds. However, halting all federal CCDF, SSBG, and TANF funds to the State of Illinois without any legitimate basis will dangerously cut child care, child welfare, and health and well-being services, making the lives of children and families worse, not better. We expect that you quickly will release the funding our state is entitled to so that hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans do not suffer.

Sincerely,



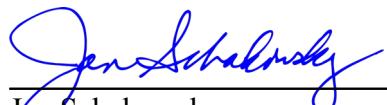
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Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



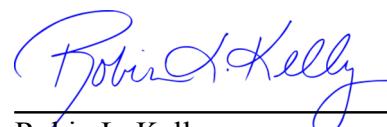
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



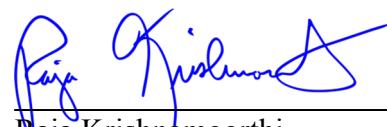
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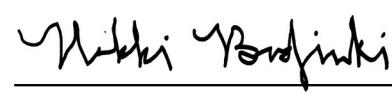
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