



May 30, 2024

## **We, the Village Equity and Transparency: Recommendations for the Illinois Transition Advisory Committee on Developing the Illinois Department of Early Childhood**

### **Introduction**

As the Transition Advisory Committee (TAC) continues to refine their equity framework, the We, the Village (WTV) coalition invites the TAC to review the following set of equity and transparency recommendations, drafted in response to the [TAC Draft Equity Framework \(Framework\)](#). WTV appreciates recent TAC additions to the Framework document, such as the inclusion of specific language about “unhoused, immigration status, or any other protected class or circumstance” to encompass diverse populations; incorporating intersectionality to account for various identities families may hold; and language modification to reflect a mindset shift from “parents” to “adults”, to be inclusive of different types of adults playing significant roles in children's lives. In addition, WTV looks forward to reviewing the upcoming crosswalk of the TAC framework and further details on the provision of services and support to both children and adults simultaneously, and tracking outcomes for both.

In many areas, the [Framework](#) aligns with the [WTV Transparency and Equity Guidelines \(Guidelines\)](#), submitted to the TAC on 1/19/24. While WTV appreciates the TAC’s commitment to transparency and equity, there is room for further elaboration on specific strategies for communication, accountability, and stakeholder feedback. Clearly defined procedures and benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness of transparency and inclusion efforts, which currently are not explicitly outlined in the Framework, will go a long way towards realizing the TAC’s equity and transparency goals.

The following is intended to assist in further refinement of the TAC [Framework](#). It is our hope that the TAC will consider these recommendations and the feedback of other stakeholders as they transition Illinois’ early childhood services to a new agency structure and beyond.

### **Areas of Alignment**

#### *1. Focus on Equity and Inclusivity:*

- Both the TAC Framework and WTV Guidelines emphasize the importance of

equity, particularly racial and socioeconomic equity, in restructuring early childhood services. The TAC Equity Framework aims to create a system where outcomes cannot be predicted by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, and it seeks to dismantle structures that maintain injustices. Similarly, WTV Guidelines prioritize racial equity as a core value, calling for proactive efforts to eliminate racial barriers. The TAC's commitment to dismantling structures that maintain injustices and ensure fair treatment and opportunities for all families is well aligned with WTV's definition of racial equity and emphasis on eliminating racial barriers.

### *2. Stakeholder Engagement:*

- Both the TAC Framework and WTV Guidelines stress the importance of including diverse voices in the transition process, especially those from marginalized or underserved communities. The [TAC Primer](#) discusses engaging families and utilizing feedback mechanisms to shape policies, aligning with the WTV's call for increased stakeholder participation, inclusive decision-making processes and the use of diverse communication channels.

### *3. Data Transparency and Disaggregation:*

- The TAC Framework and WTV Guidelines both highlight the need for collecting and reporting disaggregated data to assess and improve equity outcomes. The TAC Framework emphasizes analyzing outcomes to inform changes while the WTV Guidelines call for the open sharing of such data from the inception of the new agency.

## **Areas for Further Development**

### *1. Communication and Accessibility:*

- WTV places a strong focus on communication clarity and the accessibility of information. The TAC Framework could benefit from explicit benchmarks and accountability mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of communication and transparency efforts. WTV suggests establishing clear goals, regular communication updates, straightforward language, comprehensive roadmaps, multiple modes of communication, and independent oversight to ensure transparency and equity are maintained.
- WTV recommends using a variety of communication channels, such as

newsletters, social media, and an independent, stand alone website, to disseminate new agency information. Other communication channels could include regular virtual town halls, in-person convenings and partnership with early childhood groups like WTV to help disseminate new agency information and support convenings.

- The TAC framework mentions engagement; it would benefit from further detail on specific communication strategies that will be employed to reach a broader early childhood education and child care (ECEC) audience effectively.

## *2. Explicit Goals and Oversight:*

- WTV recommends setting benchmarks and developing clear accountability mechanisms. TAC Framework, while comprehensive in strategic approach, is less specific about the mechanisms for accountability and ongoing oversight.
- The TAC Framework highlights the importance of incorporating family and community voices; it would be useful to detail structured feedback mechanisms where stakeholders can continuously provide input on decisions and actions, ensuring their concerns are actively addressed.
- In the interest of further transparency, the TAC could also regularly share the feedback being received from early childhood stakeholders and the ways in which that feedback is being addressed by the TAC.

## **Next Steps**

### *1. Develop Clear Benchmarks and Accountability Mechanisms:*

- The TAC should consider establishing explicit transparency benchmarks and outline criteria for data accuracy and counteracting misinformation.
- The TAC should set clear metrics that accurately measure successes and challenges in addressing and rectifying existing early childhood education and child care inequities.

### *2. Enhance Communication Strategies:*

- The TAC should establish clear goals, regular communication updates, straightforward language, comprehensive roadmaps, multiple modes of communication, and independent feedback/oversight to ensure transparency and equity are maintained.

- The TAC should employ a variety of communication channels, such as newsletters, social media, and a dedicated website. Other communication ideas might include regular virtual town halls, in-person convenings, and partnerships with early childhood groups like WTV to help convene early childhood communities and disseminate information effectively.
- The TAC should include specific strategies for reaching broader audiences and ensuring accessibility of information.

### *3. Implement Structured Feedback Loops:*

- TAC should consider continuing structured feedback mechanisms, such as Listening Sessions, to continuously incorporate stakeholder input once the new agency is established. This could involve regular consultations, feedback sessions, and transparent documentation of how stakeholder input influences the decision-making processes.
- Furthermore, gathering stakeholder feedback from a broad spectrum of the Illinois early childhood sector is critical, ensuring that it is not just the same voices being heard repeatedly.
- In the interest of further transparency, the TAC could also regularly share the feedback being received from early childhood stakeholders and the ways in which that feedback is being addressed by the TAC.

### *4. Establish Independent Oversight:*

- Per [SB1](#), WTV supports the development of an independent advisory body to provide ongoing oversight and counsel to the Department of Early Childhood. This advisory body should ensure the Department functions transparently, operates with a commitment to racial equity, and meaningfully includes engagement, feedback, and counsel from parents, early childhood service providers, and other public stakeholders. This involves creating relevant committees or working groups and prioritizing data collection and timely public reporting. The advisory body's membership should reflect the regional, racial, socio-economic, and cultural diversity of Illinois to represent the needs of all children and families in the state. WTV endorses this advisory body to ensure transparency and equity in the agency's formation and ongoing operations, thereby enhancing accountability and building trust among stakeholders. Clear guidelines should be established for both the advisory body and the agency on how their relationship will function.

WTV appreciates the TAC's commitment to equity and transparency in developing this historic new early childhood agency. We believe the TAC can further enhance its efforts by establishing clear benchmarks, improving communication strategies, implementing structured feedback loops, and setting up independent oversight mechanisms. These

next steps are essential to ensure a smoother, more equitable, and transparent transition for Illinois' early childhood services. By taking these actions, the new agency's foundation will be strengthened, ultimately supporting its mission to provide equitable and transparent early childhood education and child care statewide.

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We, the Village Coalition is a group of advocates, non-profit organizations, child care providers, school districts, parents and others who have come together to fight for the well-being of Illinois' youngest children. We seek adequate, equitable, sustainable, reliable funding for children's services from birth through age five. We want to ensure all children can access quality education and care, as their parents choose. We want resources to be invested in the children and communities that need it most, in order to eliminate racial, socio-economic, and other disparities. We are working together to make sure that ALL families and early childhood providers have the resources they need to help children succeed.

