

Illinois Leaders Selected for Erikson’s Executive Fellows Program

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, July 14, 2022- In Illinois, there are approximately 916,880 children ages 0-5. As headlines of the childcare crisis, gun violence, and rising food and housing costs dominate the news, it is essential to protect and advocate for every child’s right to a safe and healthy childhood. This summer, a cross-sector of Illinois leaders in positions that influence policy, determine resource allocations, and shape the educational experience of young children will gain a comprehensive understanding of child development and the current issues children and families are facing.

Erikson Institute’s Executive Fellows program uses an anti-racist approach to explore the long-term benefits of early childhood experiences and solutions that lead to equitable access to resources. Leaders will hear from national experts on the science of brain development; the connection between adverse childhood experiences (ACES) and toxic stress; barriers and gaps in the Illinois early childhood system; and the critical need to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse early childhood workforce.

“Leaders who participated in the program continue to be catalysts for change. We’ve had alumni advocate for children and families with the passing of legislation, by increasing budget allocations or asking for public support through op-eds,” said Penny Smith, Director of Learning and Impact. Alumni of the program include Illinois’ Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, Congressman Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, State Director Cicely Fleming of Birth to Five Illinois, Kankakee County State’s Attorney Jim Rowe, and more.

A transformative component of the program is Service Day, where fellows shadow and do the work of early childhood professionals in both home- and center-based early care and educational programs located in Chicago. The fellows read to children, serve meals, engage with families, lead learning activities, and talk with staff to gain a first-hand perspective on resources, funding, staff compensation, and family needs.

The Executive Fellows program is housed under Erikson’s Early Childhood Leadership Academy, which designs programs with the belief that if a critical mass of cross-sector leaders has a deeper understanding of child development, early care and education, and their potential to influence policy, then more effective policy solutions will emerge, which will lead to improved outcomes for young children and their families exemplified in 1) Increased access and improved quality of programs and services; 2) Aligned and integrated systems and 3) the presence of widespread resource equity for all children. The program takes place every year during the months of August and September, for more information please visit, [the Executive Fellows website](#).

2022 ERIKSON EXECUTIVE FELLOWS:

Emmanuel Andre, Deputy of Policy and Strategic Litigation, Office of the Cook County Public Defender

Nichole Carter, Chief of Staff, Bright Star Community Outreach

Kirstin Chernawsky, Director of Division of Early Childhood, Illinois Department of Human Services

Representative Edgar Gonzalez, Jr., Illinois State House of Representatives, 21st District

Dr. Stacy Grundy, DrPH, MPH, Research Assistant Professor, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine

Representative Jackie Haas, Illinois State House of Representatives, 79th District

Veronica Herrero, Chief of Staff and Chief Strategy Officer, City Colleges of Chicago

Dr. Janiece Jackson, Superintendent, Lindop School District 92

Dr. William E. Johnson, Ed.D., Assistant Regional Superintendent, Lake County Schools

Judge Marlow A. Jones, Circuit Judge, 21st Judicial Circuit Court

Judge Reginald C. Mathews, Circuit Judge, 19th Judicial Circuit Court

Judge Jennifer Payne, Associate Judge, Child Protection Division, Circuit Court of Cook County

Senator Robert Peters, Illinois State Senate, 13th District

Tommie L. Robinson III, Legislative Coordinator, Services Employee International Union Healthcare

Nick Shields, Director of Communications and Public Affairs, Office of Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle

Judge Levander Smith, Circuit Judge, Child Protection Division, Circuit Court of Cook County

Senator Celina Villanueva, Illinois State Senate, 11th District

Senator Ram Villivalam, Illinois State Senate, 8th District

Dr. Wendi Wills El-Amin, M.D., Associate Dean for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine

Erikson Institute educates, inspires, and promotes leadership to serve the needs of children and families. We are a premier graduate school dedicated to child development. We provide direct services to our community's children and families. We are leaders in influencing early childhood policy. We work tirelessly every day so that all children can achieve optimal educational, social, emotional, and physical well-being. At Erikson, we know that investing in the early years of children will last a lifetime.

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