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Illinois Child Welfare Group Recognizes Legislators' Fight against Child Abuse



State Rep. Patti Bellock (R-Hinsdale), State Rep. Lou Lang (D-Skokie), and State Senator Julie Morrison (D-Deerfield) were honored by the Child Care Association of Illinois in Chicago on June 12. (Posted By David Ormsby, [Community Contributor](#) / June 18, 2014)

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(Chicago) - Illinois' top child welfare group honored key state lawmakers at its 50th Anniversary celebration in Chicago last week.

The Child Care Association of Illinois on Thursday, June 12 recognized 11 members of the Illinois General Assembly for their "consistent commitment" to improving Illinois' child welfare system, which despite some recent turbulence, has been recognized as a national model since reforms were first implemented in 1995.

"Illinois has achieved its reputation as a national child welfare model in no small way due to the consistent commitment of key Illinois lawmakers to improving care for abused and neglected children over the years," said Child Care Association of Illinois President & CEO Margaret Berglind.

"By having legislators who nurtured substantive, programmatic reforms and backed needed funding, the Illinois child welfare has been transformed."

Four of the 11 lawmakers were honored at the packed event by Berglind's group at the Blackstone Hotel.

They were:

- House Deputy Majority Lou Lang (D-Skokie)
- Assistant House Majority Leader Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago)
- House Assistant Minority Leader Patti Bellock (R-Hinsdale)
- State Senator Julie Morrison (D-Deerfield)

In 1997, Illinois' child welfare system was regarded as the worst in the nation. Labeled the "Calcutta of the nation's foster care systems" by President Bill Clinton, the news media repeatedly produced stories of abused, neglected, and murdered children in state care.

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) caseload had swelled to more than 51,000 children at the height of its dysfunction. Illinois removed more children from their homes than any jurisdiction in the country. With worker caseloads approaching 50 to 60 children each, children languished in state care for years.

"Children often slept in state offices," Berglind recalls. "Nearly one thousand state wards were shipped to residential facilities in other states".

The dire situation eventually prompted eight court consent decree settlements.

By as early as 2000, however, Berglind said that the reforms had already won widespread recognition.

"DCFS eventually earned the prestigious Harvard Innovations in American Government Award in 2000," said Berglind. "In fact, the reform efforts have today reduced the number of

state wards to 15,000, greatly improved child safety, and earned Illinois a reputation as a national model of child welfare service delivery."

Berglind says that another key factor in the reforms' success was the role played by the private sector.

"The legislative reforms vastly expanded the role of the private sector," said Berglind.

"Lawmakers introduced contractually enforced performance measures and emphasized evidence driven public policy innovations designed to promote safety and permanence for Illinois children, and private sector agencies embraced the reforms."

The other lawmakers recognized were: State Senators Willie Delgado (D-Chicago), Heather Steans (D-Chicago), Kwame Raoul (D-Chicago), Mattie Hunter (D-Chicago) and State Reps. Greg Harris (D-Chicago) and David Leitch (R-Peoria).

The new Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Director, Bobbie Gregg, was among the attendees at the group's anniversary reception.