**PRESS RELEASE**

For Immediate Release
April 1, 2014

250 Students Visited the Capitol to Advocate for a Healthier Future

SPRINGFIELD, IL – On Tuesday, April 1, approximately 250 students and adult allies from across Illinois visited the State Capitol to share their voice with state legislators as part of EverThrive Illinois’ Annual Youth Advocacy Day.

These youth champions advocated for an increase to the minimum wage as a means of increasing access to healthy food and stable lives for them and their families. Students also asked legislators to protect school health center (SHC) funding, which enables children to access crucial health services. Groups of students participated in more than thirteen legislative meetings. Students met with Senators James Clayborne, and Daniel Biss, and Representatives including Robyn Gabel, Eddie Lee Jackson, Greg Harris, Maria Toni Berrios, and Jaime M. Andrade.

Students, adult allies, and elected officials gathered in the Capitol Rotunda in the afternoon for a rally to conclude the day’s activities, which included inspiring speeches by Representative Robyn Gabel and Senators Dan Kotowski, Heather Steans, Donne Trotter, Mattie Hunter, and Kimberly A. Lightford.

Senator Lightford, sponsor of SB68 to raise the minimum wage, inspired the crowd with her “Raise Illinois!” chant and assured the teens in the crowd, “I’ve been fighting for you… you are our future,” as she shared her firm belief that every working person, young or old, deserves to earn a living wage.

EverThrive IL was thrilled to welcome back Senator Kotowski, who spoke at last year’s Advocacy Day rally. He passionately encouraged students to participate in their government and relayed his support of SHCs saying, “School health centers are making a difference in your lives” and applauding SHCs for giving students the support needed to stay healthy, stay in school, to graduate, and to get jobs.

Youth advocates also shared the spotlight at the afternoon’s rally, telling their peers why advocating for adolescent health is meaningful for them. South Beloit High School student, Sabrina Radke, told her peers, “Everybody in this room is different in some way. You are all beautiful exactly the way that you are,” inviting a round of applause from the crowd. Radke will be working in her community to share The Bully Project movie and promote her school health center’s mental health resources.

Upon the day’s conclusion, EverThrive IL Executive Director exclaimed, “This was the most successful Advocacy Day for us yet. The involvement of legislators and participation of diverse students from across the state was incredible. I hope this day is a launching pad for students to take off and lead lives of civic engagement and powerful change.”

This event was a collaborative effort brought together by EverThrive Illinois and the following organizations:

- Cahokia High School
- Corazon Community Services
- East St. Louis School Health Center, East Side Health District
- Evanston Township Community High School Health Center
EverThrive Illinois’ SMAC Youth Group (Sistas Makin’ a Change)
Gallatin County Wellness Center, Egyptian County Health Department
Heartland Health Centers, Theodore Roosevelt High School Health Center
Heartland Health Centers, Uplift High School Health Center
J.W. Eater Junior High School, Champaign-Urbana Public Health District
South Beloit School Health Center
University of Illinois-Chicago, Young Women’s Leadership Charter School Health Center

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*EverThrive Illinois works to improve the health of women, children, and families over the lifespan through community engagement, partnerships, policy analysis, education, and advocacy.*