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STATE COMMISSIONS ON POVERTY AND HUNGER SPEAK OUT ON NEED

Commissioners visit Peoria to highlight poverty's grip on Illinois; 1 in 5 Peoria residents live in poverty and approximately 1 in 6 experience food insecurity

PEORIA (Oct. 16, 2015) – The Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty and the Illinois Commission to End Hunger will be visiting Peoria human services providers on October 20, 2015, as part of a statewide listening tour. Commissioners will have the opportunity to hear from providers about how the state budget impasse is affecting individuals and families experiencing hunger and poverty in Peoria. State budget cuts to the Child Care Assistance Program, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and Meals on Wheels have impacted low-income people throughout Peoria.

“Too many Illinoisans – 1 in 3 – are poor or near poor,” said Amy Rynell, Senior Director of Research & Policy at Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights and acting co-chair of the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty. “At a time when state lawmakers should be focusing their efforts on decreasing poverty and hunger, we are seeing our human services infrastructure and safety net crumble due to the lack of a state budget.”

The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey estimates that 24,156 people in the City of Peoria lived in poverty in 2014, or 21.3% of all residents. Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap study showed that 31,130 people, or 16.6%, in Peoria County are food insecure, meaning they regularly experienced limited access to food in 2013. Commissioners and other stakeholders will come together for a press conference at **1 p.m. on Tuesday, October 20, at Easter Seals Central Illinois, 507 East Armstrong Avenue, Peoria**, to speak out share their views on the state budget and the status of poverty and hunger in Peoria. Attendees include: Jim Runyon, Executive Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, Governmental Affairs and Grants, Easter Seals Central Illinois; McFarland Bragg, Executive Director, Peoria Citizens Committee for Economic Opportunity (PCCEO); Brenda Smith, SAL Child Care Connections; and Becky Rossman, Executive Director of Neighborhood House.

“Everyone wants a budget,” said Runyon. “We differ on how we get there. We're calling on our lawmakers to pass a state budget that funds essential support for families in Peoria and all over Illinois who are experiencing poverty. We're here to work together to identify and advance short-term and long-term solutions to ending hunger and poverty.”

The current state budget and long-standing state funding challenges in Illinois have exacerbated persistent challenges for people experiencing poverty across the state. A recent study by 24/7 Wall St. highlighted the inequities Peoria residents face. Peoria was ranked sixth on a list of “The Worst Cities for Black Americans,” based on a variety of socioeconomic measures. The poverty rate is 28.2% among the city's black population; for the city's white residents, it's 10.4%.

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The listening tour event in Peoria is the second of three visits the Commissions are making statewide. The Commissions visited Pembroke Township, in Kankakee County, on Oct. 14, to learn more about the challenges facing Illinois' rural communities. The final listening event will take place as a public hearing on Thursday, Oct. 29, at Glenview Public Library, 1930 Glenview Road, Glenview, from 6:30 p.m.-8 p.m.

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The Commission on the Elimination of Poverty and the Commission to End Hunger are independent bodies created by statute that are charged with developing and monitoring state plans to cut poverty and hunger.

For more information about the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty, please visit poverty.illinois.gov and for more information about the Commission to End Hunger, please visit endhunger.illinois.gov.