



ILLINOIS COMMISSION ON THE ELIMINATION OF
POVERTY

2015 ANNUAL REPORT



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DRAFT

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LETTER FROM COMMISSIONERS

September 2015

Dear Members of the Illinois General Assembly,

It is with a particular urgency and concern that we submit to you the 2015 Annual Report of the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty. As in past years, we provide an overview of the legislative progress our state has made toward our efforts to cut poverty. This year, however, we write to you in the midst of a devastating budget impasse and a budget deficit that is estimated to be about \$6 billion.

There are almost no bright spots in this year's report. Critical safety net and human service programs in Illinois have sustained significant cuts over the past several years. The damage to Illinois's human service infrastructure was compounded with the loss of billions of dollars in revenue when the state's 5% income tax rate expired on January 1, 2015. Proposals to address our revenue crisis stalled while high poverty rates throughout Illinois continued to remain high. During this crucial time, few proposals that would address poverty saw legislative process. Now the individuals and families in our state least able to shoulder the burden of our budget crisis are the ones that are being hit the hardest and will have the most difficult time regaining stability in their lives.

The resultant devastation due to the budget impasse is not always apparent. Affected constituents at risk of homelessness, job loss and sickness often must address more immediate emergencies, such as finding safe housing or getting help for their child, before having time to call their legislators. We cannot let what is out of sight allow us to brush over the impact that the budget crisis is having on our neighbors' lives. Each of the 830,000 people in our state experiencing extreme poverty face daunting challenges in the days and months to come.

We implore you to think about each of them as you do your work. Whether it be ending the budget impasse, standing up for the revenue needed to support anti-poverty programs, or advancing legislation that will combat poverty, the power to put Illinois back on track is in your hands. Please consider the members of the Commission allies in this fight. We know together we can get Illinois back on track and end extreme poverty.

Sincerely,

Members of the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty

Introduction

Each year, the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty (“the Commission”) identifies and evaluates proposals introduced in the General Assembly that will help reduce poverty. Last fall saw passage of the Secure Choice Savings Program, which will ensure that the majority of Illinois workers can build retirement savings through their workplace. Despite this major step forward, Illinois failed to see much positive movement in the spring, failing people experiencing poverty in both the budget and policy arena. The 2015 legislative session was dominated by a budget conversation that has yet to end. In the crosshairs, few of the 19 proposals the Commission supported that could have made a difference in the lives of people experiencing poverty saw traction, and only one of the bills introduced since January has been signed into law, HB1847. HB1847 will provide access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for 40,000 Illinois families struggling with hunger. Amidst the budget impasse, HB1847 represents an important step forward.

Intentional policy decisions, like establishing the Secure Choice Savings Program and improving access to SNAP can significantly lessen hardship in Illinois, but without action to fill the state’s budget gap, hardship will undoubtedly increase. Indeed, with each passing day the state budget impasse is causing the dismantling of Illinois’s human services infrastructure. Ending poverty requires a comprehensive network of programs and services that work together to provide opportunity. It is incumbent upon decision-makers, perhaps now more than ever, to advance both legislative and budgetary solutions that support and strengthen anti-poverty programs.

Since 2008, programs that help address poverty have been steadily cut. The additional revenue resulting from the income tax rates enacted in January 2011 helped Illinois avoid a larger erosion of state programs and better control our backlog of unpaid bills. We cannot make additional progress in achieving fiscal responsibility and honor the state’s commitment to cutting poverty without maintaining stable and adequate revenue. A responsible solution to the state’s fiscal crisis must include immediate action to advancing real revenue solutions.

In the last several years, the number of Illinoisans in extreme poverty has slowly begun to decline. While still significantly higher than a decade ago, this modest progress is in jeopardy given the state’s current fiscal crisis and the failure of state lawmakers to address our state’s budget crisis.

MEASURING PROGRESS

The most current data reveal that three quarters of a million Illinoisans live in extreme poverty, up from 607,000 in 2008 when the Commission was formed. Indeed, 5.9% of the state's population remains in extreme poverty (for a family of three that means living on less than \$9,259 per year), highlighting the significant work facing the state to make real strides in reducing this figure.

The estimates presented in this section come from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement. While there are several valid sources of data on extreme poverty, this source allows for a more comprehensive picture, which provides a better benchmark for measuring Illinois's progress toward reducing poverty.

A SNAPSHOT OF EXTREME POVERTY

| 2007-2008 | 2009-2010 | 2013-2014 |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 607,247 | 823,406 | 750,457 |

A CLOSER LOOK AT EXTREME POVERTY IN ILLINOIS

Extreme Poverty by Race/Ethnicity

Extreme poverty disproportionately affects minorities.

| Race/Ethnicity | 2014 Current Situation | Percent* |
|--------------------|------------------------|----------|
| White Non-Hispanic | 329,565 | 4.0% |
| Black Non-Hispanic | 261,564 | 14.9% |
| Hispanic | 137,923 | 6.7% |

Extreme Poverty by Age

Children are more likely to live in extreme poverty than adults.

| Age | 2014 Current Situation | Percent* |
|-----------------------|------------------------|----------|
| Children (0-17) | 254,096 | 8.6% |
| Working Age (18-64) | 404,200 | 5.2% |
| Seniors (65 and over) | 92,161 | 4.8% |

Extreme Poverty by Disability Status

Working-age Illinoisans with a work-limiting disability have much higher rates of extreme poverty than their non-disabled counterparts.

| Disability Status (Working Age) | 2014 Current Situation | Percent* |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|----------|
| With a Work-Limiting Disability | 107,042 | 13.5% |
| No Work-Limiting Disability | 297,158 | 4.2% |

Extreme Poverty by Work Limitation

Over half of all Illinoisans in extreme poverty are children, seniors, or working-age people with a work-limiting disability – people who cannot or are not expected to work.

| | 2014 Current Situation |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Unable or Not Expected to Work | 453,299 |
| As a % of Those in Extreme Poverty | 60.4% |

Data Source: Social IMPACT Research Center's analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC), Microdata. Based on Census Bureau recommendations on proper data use, these estimates are 2-year averages (2008 includes 2007 and 2008; 2014 includes 2013 and 2014) to help smooth out variation due to small sample size. In 2013, the CPS ASEC implemented a redesigned survey, which included different income questions. As a result, caution should be used when comparing the 2014 estimates to prior years. For information on poverty in local Illinois communities, visit www.ilpovertyreport.org

*Percent represents the percentage of people in the demographic group who are extremely poor.

Budget Overview

People experiencing poverty in Illinois are teetering on the edge of an abyss. For years, Illinois has steadily cut state supported resources that best address poverty: education, public benefits, and human services. As Illinois faces a historic budget impasse, these resources and the individuals and families that they support, are slowly but surely falling over the edge of the cliff.

A Perfect Storm

It is no secret that Illinois has been facing a budget crisis for several years. In 2015, that budget crisis has swelled into a perfect storm:

- Illinois has a \$6 billion dollar deficit.
- Illinois leaders have been unable to pass a complete budget, several months into the state's fiscal year.
- Without a budget or other spending authority, Illinois is not legally authorized to pay its bills.
- Intermediate measures, such as court orders and discrete appropriations bills, have allowed most federal funds to flow and payments to be made in key areas like K-12 education and public benefits. These intermediate measures, however, fail to fund the bulk of the resources that help fight poverty: higher education, and human service programs like those that address homelessness, job training services, programs for people who have experienced domestic violence or sexual assault, afterschool programming, community mental health, addiction abuse and treatment, and senior support services.
- With bills going unpaid and no guarantee of reimbursement, programs for people who experience poverty are shutting down and turning people away.

Some setbacks are permanent.

With each day that Illinois's budget impasse continues, individuals and families who can no longer access the programs and services that they need are being hurt. For many of these Illinoisans, these missed opportunities can never be won back:

- A woman experiencing domestic violence who sees a window to leave her abuser, but cannot because shelter services are no longer available, may suffer untold abuse before that window opens again.
- A parent who cannot take a job because child care is not available may have to miss a rent payment, sending her family to eviction.
- A senior who is not connected to the supports he needs to stay in his home, once moved, may never go back to living independently.

The real life consequences of the dismantling of our human services infrastructure cannot be undone. While the remedial efforts by lawmakers and the courts keep dollars flowing in key program areas, the programs and services (from the Senior Help Line to homeless youth programs) that are left out of the current piecemeal structure leave gaping holes in our anti-poverty infrastructure. The causes and solutions to poverty are complex and multifaceted; a partially funded budget fails people living in poverty.

Anti-Poverty Programs Unfunded in FY2016

Anti-poverty programs in Illinois work together to provide an interconnected set of supports for individuals and families experiencing poverty. With no budget, providers throughout the state that are not getting paid are being forced to cut services or completely close their doors. As these programs disappear, the stability and economic security that these supports provide disappear as well. While a person may still be able to access Medicaid during this budget impasse, for example, if their supportive housing services that help keep them housed go away, their health will no doubt deteriorate despite access to care.



The Commission's Recommendations

In 2010, the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty created a [comprehensive strategy](#) for cutting extreme poverty. Relying on public input, relevant data, and research, the Commission developed a plan that offers a comprehensive approach to address the complex and multi-faceted nature of poverty. The recommendations contained within that plan relate to the following:

- Access to safe, decent, and affordable housing.
- Access to adequate food and nutrition.
- Access to affordable and quality health care.
- Equal access to quality education and training.
- Dependable and affordable transportation.
- Access to quality and affordable child care.
- Opportunities to engage in meaningful and sustainable work.
- The availability of adequate income supports.

Per the Commission's statutory mandate, the recommendations are consistent with international human rights standards. The Commissioners applied human rights principles and a solid understanding of those impacted by extreme poverty to guide the development of the plan.

The information that follows offers an overview of legislative action taken this year that aligned with the Poverty Commission's recommendations to cut extreme poverty.

Agenda for Change – 2015 Summary



SB11, HB3345 & SB2145 – Minimum Wage Increase

Helps move more low-wage workers out of poverty by increasing the minimum wage: **LOSING GROUND**



HB3696 & HB1288 – Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights

Provides a set of workplace and benefit standards for domestic workers and removes domestic worker exclusions from state labor laws: **LOSING GROUND**



SB2758 – Secure Choice Savings Program

Creates the Secure Choice Savings Program. Allows Illinois workers access to a retirement savings account through their employer: **MAKING PROGRESS**



SB1836 & HB3297 – Earned Sick Time Act

Requires employers to offer paid sick time to their employees commensurate with the number of hours worked: **LOSING GROUND**



HB494 – Reduce Barriers to Employment for People with Criminal Backgrounds

Reduces the hiring/licensure restrictions for people with criminal records seeking employment in schools: **MAKING PROGRESS**



HB3212 & 3931 – Reduce Barriers to Employment for People with Criminal Backgrounds

Reduces the hiring/licensure restrictions for people with criminal records seeking employment in transit and healthcare: **LOSING GROUND**



HB2549 – Best Candidate for the Job Act

Ensures that private employers properly consider candidates for employment who have previously been convicted of one or more criminal offenses and prohibits discrimination against such candidates: **LOSING GROUND**

**SB676 & HB2458 – Earned Income Tax Credit**

Increases the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit to 20% of the federal tax credit over 4 years: **LOSING GROUND**

**Schedules that Work Act – HB3554**

Requires employers to notify their employees of their work schedule at least two weeks in advance of their scheduled shift: **LOSING GROUND**

**SB0730 – TANF – Child Support Disregards**

Requires that a certain amount of child support be paid to the family rather than diverted to reimburse the government for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance the family receives: **LOSING GROUND**

**SB1248 & HB2584 – Protect Wages and Emergency Savings**

Enables individuals in the debt collection process to responsibly pay down their debt while meeting the basic needs of their family: **LOSING GROUND**

**SB1847 – Increase Access to SNAP**

Increases access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for individuals and families experiencing hunger by increasing the gross income eligibility from 130% to 165% of the federal poverty level: **MAKING PROGRESS**

**SB1414 – Improve Access to Health Care**

Continues the Navigator/In-Person Counselor Program, funding impartial health insurance enrollment assistance after federal funds are no longer available: **LOSING GROUND**

Progress Toward the Commission's Recommendations

Work Recommendations

In Illinois there are hundreds of thousands of workers who are experiencing poverty. In fact, nearly 400,000¹ people in Illinois live in a household with at least one full-time worker yet still live in poverty. The Commission's poverty elimination strategy recognizes that improving workplace compensation and job quality and providing workers with access to skill-building opportunities are central to reducing poverty. Indeed, when the Urban Institute (UI) [modelled](#) some of the Commission's recommendations in 2012, UI projected that a robust statewide Transitional Jobs Program could reduce extreme poverty by 12 percent.²

The current budget impasse puts at risk the systems and supports that help people get and keep jobs that move them out of poverty. The General Assembly and the Governor have yet to appropriate funding to support higher education – a cornerstone of creating opportunity. As a result, students that are experiencing poverty may be forced to drop out of school because they can no longer afford tuition. Adult education and training programs that prepare workers for skilled jobs and place those workers with employers are also unfunded. Summer youth programs, homeless youth programs, and similar programs that provide resources and a path forward for at-risk youth are also struggling to keep providing services without state payments. The success of any of the initiatives described below in addressing the intersection of work and poverty will only be hindered if our existing infrastructure to connect individuals to work crumbles.

¹ Social IMPACT Research Center's analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey 1-year public use microdata files.

² The Urban Institute applied the Transfer Income Model ([TRIM3](#)) and the 2008 American Community Survey to estimate how the five policies selected by the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty might reduce poverty in the State.

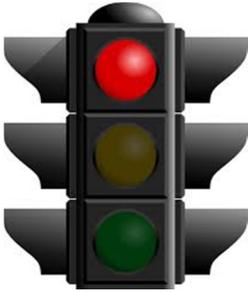
SB11, HB3345 & SB2145 – Increase the Minimum Wage**LOSING GROUND**

BILL SUMMARIES – SB11 and SB2145 increase the minimum wage from \$8.25 to \$9.00 beginning July 1, 2015, and increase it by \$0.50 each July 1 until July 1, 2019, at which point the minimum wage would be \$11.00. HB3345 increases the minimum wage from \$8.25 to \$9.00 beginning July 1, 2015, and increases it to \$10.00 per hour on and after July 1, 2016.

2015 OUTCOME – SB11 was introduced by Senator Kimberly Lightford and passed out of the Senate, but no further action was taken on the bill. SB2145 was introduced by Senator Kimberly Lightford, but no further action was taken on the bill. HB3345 was introduced by Representative Arthur Turner and passed out of the House Labor & Commerce Committee, but no further action was taken on the bill.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Improve workplace compensation by increasing minimum wage/living wage and benefit standards:* A minimum wage employee working full time year round earns roughly \$17,000 per year. That means that a single parent with two kids would fall below the federal poverty threshold of \$18,853 for a family of three in 2014. The minimum wage should provide workers a minimum standard of living necessary for health and well-being and keep working families out of poverty.

HB3696 & HB1288 – Domestic Workers Bill of Rights LOSING GROUND



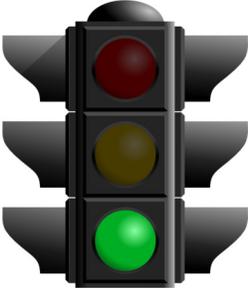
BILL SUMMARIES – HB3696 and HB1288 establish the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights. The bills provide workplace and benefit standards for domestic workers and remove domestic worker exclusions from the Minimum Wage Law, the Human Rights Act, the Wages of Women and Minors Act, and the One Day Rest in Seven Act.

2015 OUTCOME – HB3696 was introduced by Representative Elizabeth Hernandez, and it was referred to the House Business & Occupational Licenses Committee. No further action was taken on either bill. HB1288 was introduced by Representative Elizabeth Hernandez and passed out of the House. The bill was referred to the Senate Executive Committee, and no further action was taken on the bill.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Improve workplace compensation by increasing minimum wage/living wage and benefit standards and eliminate categories of workers not covered by minimum wage:* Historically, domestic workers have been excluded from many of the basic labor protections afforded to other Illinois workers. Many of the laws and policies that govern pay and conditions in the workplace simply do not apply to domestic workers. The Domestic Workers Bill of Rights would create labor standards that are currently lacking in this industry and ensure that domestic workers have a right to earn the minimum wage, protections against sexual harassment, and other basic labor protections.

SB 2758 – Secure Choice Savings Program

MAKING PROGRESS

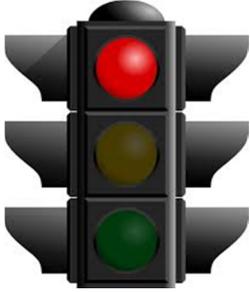


BILL SUMMARY – SB2758 creates the Illinois Secure Choice Savings Program. This bill allows employees of established employers that do not offer a qualified retirement plan, with 25 or more employees, to set aside a percentage of their wages to be deposited into a retirement savings account administered by the State Treasurer's office at no long-term cost to the state.

2015 OUTCOME – SB2758 was introduced by Senator Daniel Biss and sponsored by Representative Barbara Flynn Currie in the House in 2014. The bill passed both the houses and was signed into law by the Governor on January 5, 2015 ([Public Act 98-1150](#)).

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Improve workplace compensation by increasing minimum wage/living wage and benefit standards:* Most low-wage workers do not have access to benefits such as paid sick leave, health insurance, or employer-based retirement savings. According to research by the Woodstock Institute, 60% of Illinois low-wage workers do not have access to an employer-based retirement plan.³ More workers are retiring into poverty every year. For many low-income workers, without the added support of a retirement savings account, their Social Security benefits are not enough to retire with dignity. Improving benefit standards for the lowest-wage workers will help provide the stability needed for individuals and families to move out of extreme poverty and prevent workers from falling into poverty as they age and retire.

³ Cowan, S. (2012, September). *Coming up short: The scope of retirement insecurity among Illinois workers*. Chicago: Woodstock Institute. Available at http://www.woodstockinst.org/sites/default/files/attachments/comingupshort_sept2012_cowan_0.pdf

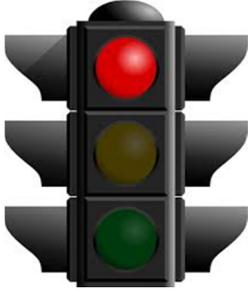
SB1836 & HB3297 – Earned Sick Time Act**LOSING GROUND**

BILL SUMMARIES – Allows employees, full and part-time, to earn up to seven paid sick days (or 56 hours) per year accrued hourly.

2015 OUTCOME – SB1836 was introduced by Senator Toi Hutchinson and assigned to the Senate Executive Committee, and HB3297 was introduced by Representative Christian Mitchell. No further action was taken on either bill.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Allow employees that traditionally do not have a right to paid sick leave (e.g., part-time employees) to accrue sick days: Nearly 80% of low-wage workers do not have a single paid sick day.⁴ These workers often have to choose between going to work sick and risking their health or taking a day off and risking their paycheck or even their job. All workers should have access to paid sick days.*

⁴ O'Connor, Rachel, Hayes, Jeff, and Gault, Barbara. (2014, July). *Paid Sick Days Access Varies by Race/Ethnicity, and Job Characteristics*. Available at <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/paid-sick-days-access-varies-by-race-ethnicity-sexual-orientation-and-job-characteristics/#sthash.RVy8U9pa.dpuf>.

HB3554 – Schedules that Work Act**LOSING GROUND**

BILL SUMMARY – HB3554 Requires employers to notify their employees of their work schedule at least two weeks in advance of their scheduled shift.

2015 OUTCOME – HB3554 was introduced by Representative Will Guzzardi. The bill passed out of the House Labor & Commerce Committee, and no further action was taken on the bill.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Improve opportunities to engage in meaningful and sustainable work:* Many low wage workers have schedules that are unpredictable and constantly fluctuating. Unpredictable schedules make it difficult to manage responsibilities at home and at work and result in serious consequences for workers and their families. When schedules are not predictable or known in advance, holding another job, attending classes, arranging child care and transportation all become extremely challenging. All workers should have access to fair and predictable scheduling.

Access to Work Recommendations

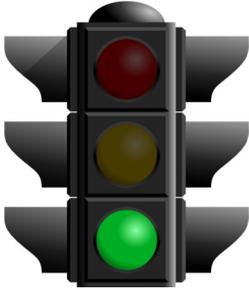
Since its inception, the Commission has held hearings and listening sessions throughout the state to hear and learn from people who experience poverty. Each year, the Commission meets people who are experiencing poverty with significant barriers to employment. Many can and do work, but only when these barriers are addressed or reduced in their lives. The Commission recognizes that one important response to poverty is addressing systemic barriers to employment. State supports must be revamped not only to stabilize families during times of need, but also connect families to training and work opportunities that allow them to move beyond hardship and gain economic stability.

For a single parent working a minimum wage job, access to affordable, quality child care is an essential to maintain employment. For an individual struggling with addiction, access to substance use treatment and mental health support may be the key to getting and keeping a job. For a survivor of domestic violence, access to services could ensure safety, and provide support to enter the workforce and gain economic security. For individuals who have experienced homelessness or struggle with mental illness, supportive housing programs can be the key to entering the workforce. Having a safe place to bathe, keep work uniforms, and get a good night's sleep are often predicates to maintaining employment.

Due to the budget impasse, the network of programs and services that help individuals access jobs are in jeopardy and many are not receiving the state payments they need to continue to operate. From domestic violence and rape victims' assistance to substance abuse treatment and childcare, services that support workers so that they can find and maintain employment are caught in the crosshairs of the budget impasse.

HB494 – Reduce Barriers to Employment for People with Criminal Backgrounds

MAKING PROGRESS



BILL SUMMARY – HB494 reduces the hiring and licensure restrictions for people with criminal records seeking employment in schools.

2015 OUTCOME – HB494 was introduced by Representative Kelly Cassidy and sponsored by Senator Patricia Van Pelt in the Senate. The bill passed both Houses. The Governor issued an amendatory veto on August 14, 2015 recommending minor changes and indicating that he supports the substance of the bill.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Adopt a policy to “Ban the Box”, also termed “Move the Box”, which prohibits job applications from asking if an individual has a criminal background, and use the state’s leadership to encourage and promote the hiring of individuals with criminal backgrounds.* Those re-entering society after incarceration need true opportunity after paying their debt to society. Unfortunately, many employers outright deny employment opportunities to anyone with a criminal record. Prohibiting employers from asking applicants about their criminal background until the applicant is selected for an interview or receives a conditional offer will open the door for more people to secure quality employment and reduce recidivism in the correctional system.

HB3931 & HB3212 – Reduce Barriers to Employment for People with Criminal Backgrounds

LOSING GROUND

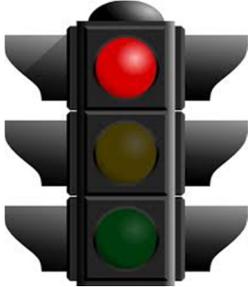


BILL SUMMARIES – HB3931 and HB3212 reduce the hiring and licensure restrictions for people with criminal records seeking employment in health care and park districts.

2015 OUTCOME – HB3931 was introduced by Representative Kelly Cassidy, and HB3212 was introduced by Representative Camille Lilly and referred to the House Health Care Licenses Committee. No further action was taken on either bill.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Encourage and promote the hiring of individuals with criminal backgrounds.* Those re-entering society after incarceration need true opportunity after paying their debt to society. Unfortunately, many employers outright deny employment opportunities to anyone with a criminal record. Prohibiting employers from asking applicants about their criminal background until the applicant is selected for an interview or receives a conditional offer will open the door for more people to secure quality employment and reduce recidivism in the correctional system.

HB2549 – Best Candidate for the Job Act
LOSING GROUND



BILL SUMMARY – HB2549 ensures that private employers properly consider candidates for employment who have previously been convicted of one or more criminal offenses and prohibits discrimination against such candidates unless there is a direct relationship between the offense and the job responsibilities of the position sought.

2015 OUTCOME – HB2549 was introduced by Representative Esther Golar and referred to the House Labor and Commerce Committee. No further action was taken on the bill.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Encourage and promote the hiring of individuals with criminal backgrounds.* Those re-entering society after incarceration need true opportunity after paying their debt to society. Unfortunately, many employers outright deny employment opportunities to anyone with a criminal record. Prohibiting employers from asking applicants about their criminal background until the applicant is selected for an interview or receives a conditional offer will open the door for more people to secure quality employment and reduce recidivism in the correctional system.

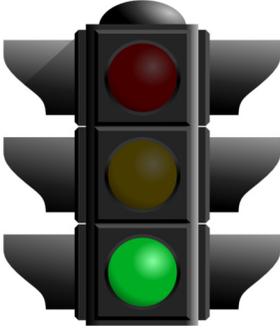
Income Support Recommendations

Nearly half of the people in our state who are experiencing extreme poverty are unable to or not expected to work; they are seniors, children, or adults with work-limiting disabilities. When work is not a viable option, it is critical that income supports and safety-net programs are available and accessible so that everyone can live their lives with dignity and free from extreme poverty.

Illinois's budget crisis puts many of these supports at risk. While a number of core programs are currently funded by court order or by virtue of federal law, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly referred to as "food stamps"), Medicaid, TANF, and Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD), the erosion of Illinois's safety-net has long-reaching effects for the beneficiaries of these critical program and their ability to live healthy and safe lives. For example, Illinois's Senior Help line connects seniors with nutrition programs like home-delivered meals (a program that is also at risk of loss during the budget impasse), transportation to medical appointments, and the like.

As the following pieces of legislation propose improvements to our public benefits system, the state's budget crisis continues to put at risk the foundation on which those proposed improvements are built.

SB1847 – Increase Access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
MAKING PROGRESS



BILL SUMMARY – SB1847 increases access to SNAP (formerly food stamps) for individuals and families experiencing hunger by increasing the gross income eligibility from 130% to 165% of the federal poverty level.

2015 OUTCOME – SB1847 was introduced by Senator Daniel Biss and sponsored by Representative Robyn Gabel in the House. The bill passed both Houses and was signed into law by the Governor on July 28, 2015 (Public Act [99-0170](#)).

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Increase the availability of adequate income supports:* Many low-wage workers are struggling to make ends meet and provide adequate nutritious food for themselves and their families. Increasing access to SNAP benefits, particularly for working families, will help 40,000 Illinois families struggling with hunger access the food assistance that they need.

HB2458 & SB676 – Earned Income Tax Credit
LOSING GROUND

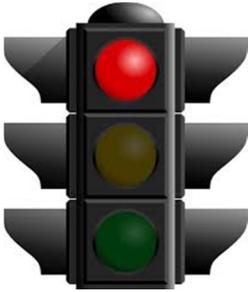


BILL SUMMARIES – HB2458 and SB676 increase the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) from 10% to 20% of the federal tax credit over 4 years.

2015 OUTCOME – HB2458 was introduced by Representative Barbara Flynn Currie and assigned to the House Revenue & Finance Committee, and SB676 was introduced by Senator Jacqueline Collins and assigned to the Senate Revenue Committee. No further action was taken on either bill.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Increase the availability of adequate income supports.* The EITC supplements the wages of poor and near-poor workers, providing more money for working families to make ends meet.

SB0730 – TANF – Child Support Disregard
LOSING GROUND



BILL SUMMARY – SB0730 requires that \$100 of the child support paid for one child and up to \$200 for two or more children (the federal maximum) be paid to their families rather than diverted to reimburse the government for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits the families are receiving.

2015 OUTCOME – SB0730 was introduced by Kimberly Lightford and passed out of the Senate. Representative Litesa Wallace sponsored the bill in the House, and the bill was assigned to the House Appropriations – Human Services Committee, but no further action was taken on either bill.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Increase the availability of adequate income supports:* Many of the families who need child support the most benefit little, if any, from the child support collected on their behalf because states may opt to retain the money as reimbursement for TANF benefits. Illinois should maximize the amount of money that goes directly to families experiencing extreme poverty by improving the pass-through and disregard policies that determine how much families who receive TANF benefit from the child support collected for them by the state.

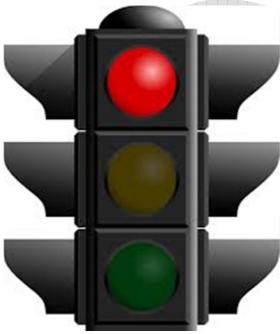
Health Care Recommendations

Access to affordable and quality health care is vital to ensure that people experiencing poverty are able to care for their families, find and keep a job and live with dignity. Poor health and poverty are intimately connected. Homelessness, poor nutrition or addiction make it harder to stay healthy. Likewise, poor health can make it hard to keep a job or take care of one's family. Meaningful access to health care, therefore, involves not only access to medical providers, but access to the resources that help individuals and families stay healthy – like access to adequate nutritious food, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, HIV/AIDS prevention, supportive housing and homelessness prevention services.

This year, the Commission highlighted legislation that would directly help individuals and families connect with health care coverage. Access to medical and behavioral health care, however, will have limited effect if the network of programs and services that help people experiencing poverty maintain their health are lost.

SB1414 – Improve Access to Health Care

LOSING GROUND



BILL SUMMARY – SB1414 continues the Navigator/In-Person Counselor Program, funding impartial health insurance enrollment assistance after federal funds are no longer available.

2015 OUTCOME – SB1414 was introduced by Senator Jacqueline Collins and assigned to the Senate Executive Committee. No further action was taken on the bill.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED – *Protect, restore, and enhance access to quality health care, including mental health and social and emotional well-being:* For individuals experiencing poverty, access to quality, affordable health care – including dental care – is essential for maintaining stability and moving out of poverty.

Housing Recommendations

Access to safe, decent and affordable housing is critical to ensuring stability for individuals and families experiencing poverty. The Commission's poverty elimination strategy recognized that affordable housing is central to addressing poverty. Without access to housing, keeping a job or maintaining one's health becomes nearly impossible.

In years past, the Poverty Commission has supported efforts in the General Assembly to protect people affected by foreclosure from being pushed into homelessness and increase resources for Illinois's Rental Housing Support Program. This year, the General Assembly did not take up any legislation that fit within the Commission's poverty elimination recommendations. Strides that Illinois has made in recent years, including restoring some homelessness prevention funding and investing in homeless youth programming, are at risk of being lost. Without a state budget, homeless youth providers, homeless shelters and a number of supportive housing programs are not being paid. Housing is a core part of Illinois's response to poverty, and any losses to our affordable housing and homelessness system as a result of Illinois's fiscal crisis will take years to rebuild, at the expense of many throughout Illinois.

Looking Forward to 2016

In the coming months the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty will be working with the Illinois Hunger Commission to seek comment and feedback on this report and engage communities around the state in efforts to cut poverty and hunger in Illinois. Please look for the final report release along with a supplement with reflections from this comment period on the Commission's website – poverty.illinois.gov – on or after December 10, 2015.

If you would like to submit comments or feedback on this report draft you may do so online at poverty.illinois.gov.

The recommendations outlined in *Building a Pathway to Dignity & Work*, the Commission's poverty elimination strategy released in December 2010, will continue to inform the work of the Poverty Commission and provide guidance to decision makers and advocates committed to advancing solutions for individuals experiencing poverty. The Commission will continue to weigh in on policy proposals that will positively or negatively impact the State's progress toward the goal of reducing extreme poverty and seek greater opportunities to work with policymakers to advance solutions in the coming year.

As the state's budget situation continues to erode, it is critical that our leaders do not lose sight of the people who experience poverty every day in Illinois, their hardships, and their needs. By working together to advance policy and budget solutions that help people meet their most basic human needs and move out of poverty, we create stronger communities and a stronger Illinois.

With leadership and collaboration among all of us – those impacted by poverty, community stakeholders, and decision-makers – we can take targeted, meaningful action to end poverty.

Commission Membership

Co-chairs:

Janice Glenn, Office of the Governor

Evelyn Diaz, Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights

Elected Officials:

Jacqueline Collins—State Senator

Mary Flowers—State Representative

Robyn Gabel—State Representative

Public Members:

Al Riddley

Michael B. Golden—Co-Founder, One Million Degrees

Jim Hires—Executive Director, Eastern Illinois Food Bank

Andy Kulczycki—Executive Director, Community Service Center of Northern Champaign County

Eithne McMenamin—Associate Director, City Affairs, Chicago Coalition of the Homeless

Gayle Nelson—Development Consultant and Leadership Coach

Wendy Pollack—Director, Women's Law & Policy Project, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

Maria Whelan—President, Illinois Action for Children

Victor Dickson—President, Safer Foundation

Ex-Officio Members:

Nirav Shah—Illinois Department of Public Health

Tracey Williams—Department of Corrections

Brian Colgan—Office of the Lieutenant Governor, State of Illinois

Aaron Zivic—Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services

Hector Villagrana—Illinois Department of Human Rights

Vinni Hall—Illinois State Board of Education

John Egan—Department of Child and Family Services

Eric Zarnikow—Illinois Student Assistance Commission

Layla Suleiman—Illinois Latino Family Commission

Antonio Baxton—Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

Fernando Chavarria—Illinois Department of Economic Security

James Dimas—Illinois Department of Human Services

Michael Holmes—Executive Director, Illinois African-American Family Commission