



2008 Report on Illinois Poverty: Opportunities for Change

The *2008 Report on Illinois Poverty* showcases how Illinois families struggle to achieve or maintain economic stability. Negative economic shifts including stagnating wages and rising costs have taken their toll on people across Illinois, hitting those with the least to start with the hardest.

The report finds that poverty continues to cast a pall on Illinois' economic future. Statewide, poverty increased in 74 of Illinois' 102 counties. It now afflicts more than 1.5 million Illinoisans, representing a population large enough to rank as the nation's fifth-largest city. Nearly 250,000 additional Illinoisans have succumbed to poverty since 1999, a 19 percent increase.

But there is hope. There is a movement stirring throughout the country to act now to address poverty. With this momentum building and new collective efforts in Illinois, we can eliminate the poverty that deprives people of their human rights. **The following policy recommendations highlight meaningful change opportunities that together can help make strong, safe, and stable communities across Illinois that are poverty free.**

Establish the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty in Illinois so there is a formal entity to comprehensively address poverty in Illinois by developing a substantive, measurable plan to cut the number of people living in extreme poverty in Illinois in half by 2015.

Improve the Payday Loan Reform Act to strengthen provisions that protect Illinois families from abusive predatory lending practices that can lead them down the path to financial ruin.

Increase the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit to put more dollars in the pockets of low-income Illinois families. This improves the likelihood that families will be able to meet basic needs and save money for the future.

Provide paid sick leave for Illinois workers who do not currently have paid sick days. This would help millions of Illinois workers stay home when illness strikes without having to forfeit a day's wage.

Support low-wage workers and their families by making it easier to receive Food Stamps, medical, and cash assistance by allowing clients to select the office that is most accessible to them for applications and ongoing case management.

Make child care more affordable for working families by raising income eligibility guidelines to 200% of the poverty line and adopting a co-payment scale that makes them affordable while capping them at 10% of family income.

Increase state financial aid resources so that awards better reflect student need and more low-income Illinoisans can afford to increase their educational attainment.

Increase the monthly TANF cash assistance grant by 15% to help poor families with dependent children.

Enact comprehensive reform of Illinois' revenue system to cure the structural deficit and provide adequate dollars for the general revenue fund to support the state's priorities, including the fight against poverty and adequate funding for human services.

Create an Illinois Commission on Children and Youth to develop a strategic plan for state investments in programs and services for children and youth. Include a focus on education completion to help ensure that all youth have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and receive appropriate supports when they face challenges in doing so.

Increase investments into effective training strategies to prepare the Illinois workforce for the future and help make Illinois more competitive in recruiting new business to grow job opportunities.

Expand public health insurance coverage to poor adults who are currently not eligible (nonelderly, childless, and non-disabled) to ensure that those least able to obtain coverage can have this first crucial component to accessing care.

Include affordable housing construction and rehabilitation in the proposed capital budget to both provide and expand safe, decent, affordable housing options and help improve Illinois' economy.

Implement a universal school breakfast program, rather than an optional program, in Illinois districts with high percentages of low-income students. This can significantly increase low-income student participation in the program since it reduces stigma and eliminates fee barriers for many low-income families.

Create a universal Children's Savings Account program in Illinois that includes financial education to ensure that all children have the opportunity for lifelong learning and asset building by providing youth and their families with the tools to accumulate savings.

Mid-America Institute on Poverty of Heartland Alliance

4411 N. Ravenswood
Chicago, IL 60640
Ph: 773.336.6075
Fx: 773.506.6649
maip@heartlandalliance.org
www.heartlandalliance.org/maip

