

CONTACT: Annika Yates
Email: ayates@heartlandalliance.org
Phone: 312.870.4960

CONTACT: Chris Lackner
Email: chris@lacknerandrews.com
Phone: 773.991.1908

POOR BY COMPARISON: THE DREARY STATE OF THE PRAIRIE STATE *Illinois fails to stack up to other states on over 25 key poverty indicators*

CHICAGO – “*Poor by Comparison: Report on Illinois Poverty*,” a new report released today by the Chicago-based Social IMPACT Research Center (IMPACT), a program of Heartland Alliance, examines how Illinois compares to other states on over 25 key metrics associated with poverty and hardship.

“By many accounts, Illinois should be a national leader on addressing poverty: Illinois is the fifth largest state, has a rich mix of industries, is home to world class educational institutions, and has a state economy larger than that of many independent nations,” said Amy Terpstra, Director of the Social IMPACT Research Center and one of the report’s authors. “But when it comes to the well-being of its people, particularly those at the bottom of the economic spectrum, Illinois is not stepping up to be the leader it should be.”

While there are some bright spots, on the whole, Illinois has plenty of room for improvement:

- 34 states have a better unemployment rate than Illinois’s 6.4% as of November 2014
- 33 states have fewer households paying over half their income on rent than Illinois’s 24.2%
- 24 states have a lower poverty rate than Illinois’s 14.7%
- 22 states have a lower uninsured rate among children and working-age adults than Illinois’s 12.6%
- 21 states have a better on-time high school completion rate than Illinois’s 82%
- 17 states have a lower food insecurity rate than Illinois’s 14.2%
- 15 states have a lower asset poverty rate than Illinois’s 23.5%

“Compounding Illinois’s poor showing on these various indicators is the mounting state budget deficit and a tax structure that demands proportionately more from those who have less,” said Sid Mohn, President of Heartland Alliance and Co-Chair of the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty. “If our state leaders want to build Illinois’s reputation as the best place to live, go to school, work, and play, they must make intentional, long-view decisions that shore up the well-being of all Illinoisans, especially the nearly one third with low incomes.”

In addition to addressing the state budget’s structural deficit and tax policy, the report offers additional recommendations that, if implemented, would help ensure the people of Illinois can live the best lives possible and make Illinois more competitive in the process:

- Improve access to programs, like Illinois’s Bright Start 529 college savings program, that help low- and moderate-income households save for post-secondary education.
- Support rental housing subsidies, increase revenue for homeless prevention programs and supportive housing, and provide capital funds for construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing units.
- Increase Illinois’s minimum wage to \$11 per hour to ensure low-wage workers earn enough to meet their basic needs.
- Invest in outreach and enrollment assistance programs for Medicaid and the Illinois health insurance marketplace.

- Strengthen exemption laws that protect a person's bank account and other assets, up to a certain level, so those in debt can continue to work and support themselves and their families.

“Poor by Comparison: Report on Illinois Poverty” and related infographics available for download at www.ilpovertyreport.org.

All images to be credited to The Social IMPACT Research Center.

For County Data, please visit www.ilpovertyreport.org. Contact IMPACT for assistance accessing and interpreting local data.

The report was developed by the Social IMPACT Research Center, a program of Heartland Alliance, with support from The Chicago Community Trust and The Libra Foundation.

ABOUT US

The Social IMPACT Research Center at Heartland Alliance conducts applied research for nonprofits, foundations, advocacy groups, governments, coalitions, and the media to help them measure, inform and grow their social impact. IMPACT also regularly reports on key poverty trends to equip decision makers with sound data to inform public policy. For more information, visit: www.socialimpactresearchcenter.org or follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/IMPACTHeartland> or like us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/social.impact.research>.

Heartland Alliance – the leading anti-poverty organization in the Midwest – believes that all of us deserve the opportunity to improve our lives. Each year, we help ensure this opportunity for more than one million people around the world who are homeless, living in poverty, or seeking safety. Our policy efforts strengthen communities; our comprehensive services empower those we serve to rebuild and transform their lives. For more information, visit: www.heartlandalliance.org or follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/heartlandhelps> or like us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/heartlandalliance>.

###