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CHA critics say work rule might violate child-welfare law

Parents with children under 6 are affected

By Sara Olkon | Tribune reporter
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Housing advocates say a proposed [Chicago Housing Authority](#) work requirement might violate a state child-welfare law.

Under a plan set for a vote this month, most adults living in public housing could face eviction if they do not begin looking for work or attend school.

CHA critics say the proposal flies in the face of Illinois' Wrongs to Children Act, which says state or local government agencies cannot force a single parent of any child under 6 to work if the job would "unreasonably interfere" with child-care responsibilities.

The proposed CHA rule would exempt a single parent from working only during the first year of a child's life.

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"The language of the law is clear," said [Bob Whitfield](#), attorney for the CHA's main tenant organization, the Central Advisory Council. He is asking the housing authority to extend the proposed exemption to single parents of children under 6.

Officials, however, disagree with advocates over what constitutes "unreasonable" interference.

A spokesman for the CHA said the work requirement would not violate the law because the housing agency is prepared to provide subsidized day care for parents who need it.

To aid this effort, CHA recently awarded a two-year \$650,000 contract to Illinois Action for Children, an early-childhood advocacy and social service group, to connect parents with day-care providers.

"There is nothing unreasonable" about the proposal, said CHA spokesman Bryan Zises.

Some residents and advocates disagree, expressing skepticism about the child-care promise.

"A lot of times CHA promises them services, but they fail to deliver," said Logan Square Neighborhood Association housing organizer Tami Love, who works with residents of the Lathrop Homes on the Near

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place. But right off the bat, forcing this program on people? It's inhumane."

Love questioned the availability of quality day care in the area.

Leonette Coates, chief program officer for Illinois Action for Children, said she expects that her group will be able to serve all families who seek day care.

She said that among other options, the group will work with parents to place their children with family and trusted friends under a program that pays such license-exempt caregivers \$12.37 a day per child.

Wendy Pollack, director of the Women's Law and Policy Project at the Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, said the recent economic slowdown and loss of jobs only add to the difficulties

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many of these single parents will face.

The CHA Board is expected to vote on the proposal April 30. If it passes, the work rule would go into effect this fall. The requirements are among a sweeping set of changes designed to reform Chicago's public housing.

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