

Poverty Action Report



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Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

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Illinois Budget Reflects Administration's Priorities Gains for Children, Women, Seniors, Veterans

The Illinois General Assembly wrapped up its work for the year, on May 4, with passage of the 2007 fiscal year budget, which will fund state government from July 1, 2006, to June 30, 2007. Gov. Rod Blagojevich's fourth budget is in keeping with the spending priorities—with an emphasis on health care and education—to which he has adhered in prior years.

All Kids

The budget funds the first year of All Kids, the universal health care program for all uninsured children in Illinois. The legislation establishing the All Kids program became law last fall, but the new budget ensures that the program is funded and will start on time on July 1, 2006. This continues the Blagojevich administration's national leadership on health care issues. Bucking the trend in many states to slash health coverage as a budget-balancing device, Illinois has enacted and funded historic expansions, while holding the line on the base Medicaid program.

Preschool for All

Also funded is the initial year of the Preschool for All program, which will eventually offer free, optional preschool to all 3- and 4-year-olds in the state. The funding for the first installment of this initiative is a \$45 million increase in the Early Childhood Block Grant. Eligibility for the program also was extended to all families, with the first priority being providers who primarily serve children at risk of academic failure, the second priority being providers who primarily serve families below four times the federal poverty level (\$80,000 for a family of four), and then all other families (see "Illinois Takes Leap Forward on Early Childhood Education and Care," in this issue).

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Per-Pupil Spending

The budget contains over \$400 million in new funding for basic primary and secondary education. Among other initiatives, this raises the basic “foundation level” (the amount of state funding per pupil) by \$170 per student.

Education funding is an avowed priority of the Blagojevich administration, and so overall funding is increasing in this budget in spite of the fiscal crisis in Illinois. Nevertheless, the funding remains well below the generally recognized goal for the “foundation level.” The overall education funding picture (state plus local funds) continues to be characterized by deep inequities due to over reliance on local property taxes. The inequity can be offset in a way that does not punish the wealthier districts, but only by increasing the state contribution to the less wealthy districts.

Child Care Assistance

The state child care assistance program, which helps low-income working families pay for full-day, full-year education and care, received a net increase of \$34 million in General Revenue Funds, including \$50 million to fund the first child care provider rate increase in six years. This program is the centerpiece of the state’s work-focused welfare reform and ongoing supports for working families (see “Illinois Takes Leap Forward on Early Childhood Education and Care,” in this issue).

Other programs that serve children and received increases in this year’s budget include mental health programs, early intervention programs, and cost-of-living increases for some programs that the Departments of Human Services and Children and Family Services administer and social service agencies provide.

Health Services

The screening and treatment program for breast and cervical cancer is expanded in the budget. Women with income up to 250 percent of the poverty level are now eligible for screening, and those who need treatment and are not otherwise covered will be eligible for treatment.

Seniors receiving Medicaid will have the asset limit substantially increased, that is, they will be able to keep more of their funds (up from \$12,500, to \$17,500) before losing eligibility. Department on Aging case management and coordination services are also funded. A new program will offer affordable comprehensive health coverage to veterans to the extent that federal veterans’ programs deny them coverage.

Student Aid for College

There is a substantial increase for needs-based student aid for college, and there is a new program to provide grants to middle-income families sending a child to college in Illinois. The student-aid increase is in the Monetary Awards Program, which helps thousands of low-income students, including “nontraditional” students (low-wage workers, single parents, etc.), go to college. This is one of the state’s most important policies to promote economic opportunity and upward mobility.

Affordable Housing

The Affordable Housing Trust Fund and the Rental Housing Support Program fund, originally targeted for “fund sweeps” where “excess” money would be diverted to the general revenue fund, were left undisturbed in the final budget. This recognizes the compelling affordable housing shortage in the state and the ongoing acute need for these funds to stay with and be used for their intended purposes.

More Needed for Human Services Staffing

The new budget continues to support too few employees in state agencies, especially those charged with implementing key programs for low-income people at the community offices of the Department of Human Services. Chronic staff shortages prevent the state from properly delivering critically needed programs.

Many human service providers did not receive a cost-of-doing-business increase. These providers are the delivery system for many key programs, and they are unable to maintain the adequate delivery of critical services at the current level of funding.

Meeting the State’s Spending Commitments

There has been much concern about the ability of state revenues to fund the state’s spending commitments fully. The state has a structural deficit, under which the ordinary revenues of our existing tax structure fail to produce enough money to pay for the programs and policies that the General Assembly enacts and the voting public demands.

The Blagojevich administration has aggressive priorities that it wants to fund, including its exemplary performance on health care and early childhood education and care. It can do this and still balance the budget only by identifying new sources of revenue and innovative management of the budget. For example, the administration has restructured the

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pension system (allowing a two-year hiatus in payments to bring the pension funds up to date, but also calling for large annual payments to begin again next year), undertaken various bond initiatives to take advantage of low interest rates, increased many fees and payments to the state, and diverted special purpose funds to the general revenue fund. These tactics have succeeded so far, but many of them are short-term and as a whole do not focus on the underlying structural deficit or lead to a stable financial foundation for the governor's initiatives. The structural deficit remains a major problem.

Whoever wins this fall's election will face a crossroads in confronting the state's structural deficit. The strong initiatives on health care and education are extremely vital advances in public policy in Illinois. They must continue and expand, and both gubernatorial candidates must promise to continue these trends and avoid any rollbacks. But these initiatives and the rest of state government need a healthier revenue stream. Fundamental reform of the revenue system is badly needed, and there must be a full discussion of all the possible solutions. ■

For more information, please contact John at johnbouman@povertylaw.org

What the Federal Government Must Do to End Poverty

Clearinghouse Review Special Issue

Poverty must be on the national agenda and the federal government must perform an active role in redressing poverty, according to the May–June 2006 *Clearinghouse Review*, out later this month.

The special issue of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law comes out of the poverty that Hurricanes Katrina and Rita exposed for all Americans to see, some for the first time. Prominent intellectuals and members of the poverty law community address factors causing the hurricane victims' extreme poverty; the federal government's role in antipoverty measures; and the states' role in eliminating poverty. The programs and policies in the special issue are a blueprint for a federal strategy to end poverty in America.

Single copies of the special issue are available to nonsubscribers at \$30 a copy for nonprofit organizations and \$60 a copy for others. ■

Send subscription or single-copy orders to Nancy Carey at nancycarey@povertylaw.org

New Federal Medicaid Provision Creates Health Opportunity Accounts, States Should Be Cautious

The Deficit Reduction Act, the federal budget law passed last February, creates a new option for states to replace regular Medicaid coverage with a Health Opportunity Account (HOA). This is a strategy to advance the Bush administration's theme of "consumer-driven health care" through a product that looks like a Health Savings Account (HSA) for Medicaid beneficiaries. Effective January 1, 2007, up to 10 states may start HOA demonstration projects. States should be very cautious: they are not likely to realize any savings for the Medicaid program, and participating states may become financially and medically vulnerable.

An HOA, like an HSA, is coupled with a high deductible health plan with the account used to pay for the many medical expenses not covered by the plan. In an HOA the state deposits funds into the account. In an HSA the individual makes the deposits. The state will deposit up to \$2,500 for an adult and \$1,000 for a child each year. States may set deductibles at up to 110 percent of the yearly account deposit. An account having been depleted and the deductible met, regular Medicaid covers enrollees. If the enrollee loses Medicaid coverage during the year, he may take the account with him and use it for approved purposes, such as employment training, within three years.

The idea behind consumer-driven health care is that individuals will shop around for the best prices and thus drive down costs. They will avoid "unnecessary" purchases of medical care and services because the money is coming out of their pocket. However valid these assumptions may be in the HSA context, there are problems in the HOA context. Medicaid enrollees cannot shop around for good prices because all Medicaid providers receive the same negotiated rates for services. While the HOA provision allows participants to visit non-Medicaid providers, it allows states to pay those providers only up to 125 percent of the regular Medicaid rates—still far below market rates. To the extent that these higher rates do motivate health care providers, they will motivate them to exit Medicaid and just serve HOA participants.

Another primary idea behind consumer-driven health care is that it will cut down on unnecessary services. For the groups that can opt into an HOA—low-income children and parents—the greater problem is the underutilization of primary and preventive and diagnostic care, particularly well-child care. HOAs will motivate parents to avoid using the account so that they have it to use in an emergency and they can avoid possibly having to pay the 10 percent deductible

over and above the amount in the account. The most likely scenario is that the HOA arrangement will cause many to go without necessary services, thereby worsening underutilization.

States should not experiment with this flawed policy. Moreover, advocates and others should monitor the experience in states that do opt for HOA demonstrations and prepare for this policy becoming mandatory or nationwide. ■

For more information, contact John at johnbouman@povertylaw.org.

Momentum for a Right to Counsel in Civil Case *Clearinghouse Review* Special Issue

Low-income clients' unmet legal needs in civil cases are growing. Many clients who face severe legal consequences can neither afford private lawyers nor obtain counsel from legal aid programs stretched far too thin. They lose parental rights to their children. They lose their homes. They cannot access essential health care. While defendants who face incarceration in criminal cases have a constitutional right to counsel, at public expense if necessary, parties to civil cases have no comparable right, no matter how potentially devastating the outcome.

To demolish this monumental barrier to justice, a burgeoning national coalition of poverty law advocates is developing state-level strategies to achieve a right to publicly funded counsel for low-income people in civil cases. The right is otherwise known as "civil Gideon," after *Gideon v. Wainwright*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court, in 1963, found a constitutional right to counsel for criminal defendants.

The entire July-August 2006 issue of *Clearinghouse Review: Journal of Poverty Law and Policy* will cover this topic. The special issue will have articles examining efforts in several states and Canada to recognize the right to counsel, a survey of state statutes guaranteeing counsel, and an analysis of the status of the right under federal law 25 years after the Supreme Court found no blanket right to counsel in any civil case. The special issue will also consider the right to civil counsel under international law and explore lessons from the defender side of implementing the right to counsel in criminal cases.

Michael Greco, the American Bar Association President resident who has been voicing the need for more available counsel for low-income people, will introduce the special issue. At its annual meeting in August the ABA will consider

a resolution to support appointed counsel at public expense for low-income people in cases where basic human needs are at stake. ■

For information on obtaining a copy of the special issue, contact Ilze Hirsch, Clearinghouse Review editor, ilzehirsch@povertylaw.org.

Medicaid Beneficiaries Now Must Prove that They Are Citizens

Medicaid applicants and enrollees will have to prove that they are citizens in order to qualify for benefits. The Deficit Reduction Act requires such proof beginning July 1 this year. Advocates should be aware of resources available to assist Medicaid beneficiaries in proving that they are citizens.

U.S.-born Medicaid beneficiaries must present either a birth certificate or a U.S. passport. Citizens born outside the United States must show a certificate of naturalization, a certificate of U.S. citizenship, or a report of a birth abroad.

Many citizens are at risk of being dropped from the Medicaid program. Particularly at risk are the elderly and mentally ill who may have lost track of their birth certificate or never had one.

Current enrollees should begin gathering these documents for themselves and their families. Illinois-born persons who have lost copies of their birth certificate can go to the Illinois Vital Records website at <http://www.idph.state.il.us/vitalrecords/birth.htm> for instructions on how to order a new copy by mail, fax, phone, or in person. To have your birth record searched, go to <http://www.idph.state.il.us/vitalrecords/vital/pdf/birthfrm.pdf>. Pay \$10 for a copy and \$15 for a certified copy.

U.S.-born citizens without a birth certificate can prove that they are citizens with a U.S. passport. Those without a passport may present other documents, according to Families USA (www.familiesusa.org). U.S.-born citizens without a passport must have a letter of no record from the State. The letter must show the citizen's name and date of birth and state in what years a birth record was searched for and that no such record is on file. Then they must present at least one early public record. Such a record may be a baptismal certificate, a hospital birth certificate, a census record, an early school record, a family bible record, a doctor's record of postnatal care, or a notarized affidavit of birth from an older blood relative with personal knowledge of the birth. Such a record must show the date and place of birth.

Minors may present a previous U.S. passport, a naturalization certificate, or a current and valid driver's license, government ID, or military ID. If none of these records is available, the minor, accompanied by a U.S. citizen whom the minor has known for at least two years, may present a combination of signature documents (social security card, bank card, or library card).

The Social Security Administration accepts documents that might be easier for enrollees to supply but that the Deficit Reduction Act does not list. Such documents may be a religious record of birth, a record receipt of Social Security Insurance, an American Indian card, or evidence of civil service employment before June 1, 1976.

Whether the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services will accept documents that the Deficit Reduction Act does not list is unclear. So that families do not lose their health care benefits, advocates would do well to use existing resources and to work with states on implementing the new eligibility rule. ■

If you are unable to secure documentation or are experiencing long delays, contact John Bouman at 312.263.3830.

New Staff Attorney—Legal Editor for *Clearinghouse Review*

Jason T. Vail, who lives in the Seattle, Washington, area, began work last month as a part-time telecommuting staff attorney—legal editor for the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law's *Clearinghouse Review*. Vail will edit articles, help plan regular and special issues of the *Review*, and solicit articles for publication, among other responsibilities.

"I'm very excited to be joining the Shriver Center," says Vail. "*Clearinghouse Review* has always been an important part of my client-based practice with Northwest Justice Project, and I'm looking forward to bringing this background to the editorial team. I hope my contributions will enhance the *Review*'s value as a vital tool for poverty law advocates across the country."

Vail has been an attorney in various capacities for about five years at Northwest Justice Project, the largest civil legal aid program in Washington State and the state's Legal Services Corporation—funded program. He will continue to work part-time as a general practitioner on Northwest Justice Project's statewide legal aid telephone hotline. Vail also is the editor of the Washington State Young Lawyers Division publication, is an active member of several Washington State Bar Association committees, and regularly teaches courses on legal ethics and legal writing for a community college paralegal program. Before law school, Vail was art director at an advertising firm for four years and continued freelance design work during law school.

Vail replaces Margaret Becker, who was a telecommuting (from New York City) staff attorney—legal editor with the Shriver Center for five years before becoming a staff attorney at the Staten Island office of Legal Services of New York. ■

Violence Victims Are a Step Closer to Having Safer Homes

Illinois General Assembly Passes Safe Homes Act

Advocates are looking at the recent passage of the Safe Homes Act, House Bill 4715, as a victory in the first of many steps to make homes a safe place for violence victims. The Safe Homes Act that the Illinois General Assembly passed last month provides that a victim of domestic violence or sexual violence has certain rights concerning the victim's rental property. Depending upon the circumstances, the victim may obtain such relief as requiring that a lock be changed and a lease terminated. The bill now goes to Gov. Rod Blagojevich for his signature.

The Safe Homes Act is necessary to allow victims of domestic and sexual violence to secure safe housing and leave dangerous housing. "Too often, victims of domestic and sexual violence suffer not only physical and emotional violence but also the devastation of being displaced from their homes because of violence," says Kate Walz of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. "And sexual assault victims are frequently prohibited from terminating their leases, even in cases where the sexual assault occurred on the premises," she continued.

Victims of domestic and sexual violence now have assurances of being able to seek safety:

- Victims who fear the imminent threat of violence may leave their apartment and tenancy by giving written notice to the landlord three days before or after they leave the property.
- Victims of sexual violence may end their rental agreement if they supply third-party evidence that violence occurred at the property.
- Victims may request a lock change from the owner under certain circumstances.

"While this legislation does not contain comprehensive protections for victims of violence in unsafe home environments, it will pave the way for better policy that recognizes the special housing needs of victims of domestic and sexual violence," said Wendy Pollack, director of the Women's Law and Policy Project of the Shriver Center. The Illinois Association of Realtors and the bill's sponsors, Rep. Robin Kelly (D-38) and Sen. Kwame Raoul (D-13), will continue to discuss improvements on the law, particularly as it relates to protecting victims of violence when the perpetrator is a leaseholder. The realtors, the lawmakers, and the advocates plan to talk shortly about proposals to the General Assembly in the fall veto session. ■

For more information, contact Kate Walz at katewalz@povertylaw.org, or Wendy Pollack at wendypollack@povertylaw.org.

ILLINOIS HOUSING POLICY UPDATE

Comprehensive Housing Planning Act

The Comprehensive Housing Planning Act, Senate Bill 2290, which both chambers of the Illinois General Assembly passed, codifies provisions of the governor's 2003 executive order and permanently requires a comprehensive state housing policy. It calls for state departments, such as the Departments of Human Services, Transportation, and Commerce and Economic Opportunity, to work with the Illinois Housing Development Authority and municipalities so that state and local plans and dollars are connected to preserve and build affordable, workforce housing for underserved population groups.

Location Matters

The "Location Matters" bill, S.B. 2885, now with Gov. Rod Blagojevich, links jobs and housing by providing incentives for employers to consider and invest in housing options for the local workforce.

State Budget

The budget negotiations identified cuts in both Rental Housing Support Program Funding and the Illinois Affordable Housing Trust Fund as possible special fund sweeps for the 2007 fiscal year. Because of housing advocates' aggressive efforts, the final budget did not include the cuts.

The final budget did include all of the proposed funding for homelessness prevention, supportive housing, and rental assistance programs. ■

Illinois Takes Leap Forward on Early Childhood Education and Care

The 2007 fiscal year budget approved by the Illinois General Assembly fully funds the major early childhood education and care initiatives that Gov. Rod Blagojevich announced when he unveiled his proposed budget three months ago. This includes \$50 million to increase the state reimbursement rate to providers caring for the low-income children in the state child care assistance program (CCAP) and \$45 million to move toward making preschool education available to all 3- and 4-year-olds in Illinois.

Child Care Assistance Program

The CCAP helps low-income parents pay for the full-day, full-year care they need to work and go to school. Parents choose their provider, and providers are reimbursed on a payment scale that varies with the type of provider, the age of the child, and the region of the state. Parents' copayments are based on their family income and size. Illinois pays the balance of the state reimbursement. Approximately 200,000 low-income children in Illinois participate in the CCAP.

The amount of the state child care reimbursement has not changed in six years. Meanwhile, costs of staff, space, utilities, and supplies have all continued to rise. Due to the stagnant state reimbursement rate, providers have reduced the number of CCAP children they are willing to serve or stopped serving such children altogether, cut corners on quality, started charging parents more than the amount of their copayment to make up for the low state rate, and closed classrooms or even whole programs.

Federal law requires the state to provide the low-income children who qualify for the CCAP (family income must be below 50 percent of state median income to qualify for the program) with "equal access" to the same quality of care as higher-income children. Federal guidelines presume equal access if the state reimbursement rate is equivalent to the 75th percentile, that is, high enough to purchase three out of every four slots in the child care market (market rates are determined by a sophisticated biennial market rate survey of thousands of child care providers). Illinois's reimbursement rates have fallen so low that in the most populated regions of the state the rates provide access to only less than one out of

every five slots, that is, they are below the 20th percentile. The results are not much better in other regions of the state.

The General Assembly has long been concerned about this problem and two years ago passed legislation directing the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), which administers the CCAP, to report on how to reform Illinois child care reimbursement rates. IDHS worked with stakeholders around the state to prepare a report, which has laid the foundation for the rate increases and restructuring included in the budget that the governor proposed and the General Assembly adopted.

The first major breakthrough on rates occurred last January when the Service Employees' International Union (SEIU) Local 880 won its first contract with the state on behalf of the nearly 50,000 licensed and license-exempt home child care providers receiving payments from the CCAP. This agreement took effect on April 1 and includes a 35 percent increase (over 39 months) in the rate for license-exempt home providers and nearly as large increases for licensed homes. The Blagojevich administration subsequently agreed to provide comparable increases, also effective April 1, for child care centers in the 2007 fiscal year, and the administration's proposed 2007 fiscal year budget reflected that agreement. To keep pace with the increases for home providers over the 39 months negotiated by SEIU, centers also will have to receive sizable increases in the 2008 and 2009 fiscal year budgets.

The final 2007 fiscal year budget includes a net increase of \$34.3 million in general revenue funds for the CCAP. Additions to the budget include \$50.3 million for provider rate increases (\$32.8 million for home providers represented by SEIU Local 880 and \$17.5 million for centers) and \$14 million to cover anticipated growth in the program. The release of a \$10 million reserve on funds and \$20 million in anticipated savings from two cost-control initiatives offset the additions.

A work group of stakeholders and IDHS child care bureau staff recommended the cost-control initiatives. The work group last summer thoroughly reviewed the CCAP for accountability and efficiency measures to implement without making it more difficult for needy children to access the program. One measure requires child care centers funded through a City of Chicago subcontract to follow the same stringent income-verification procedures

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applied to all other families in the program. The other requires license-exempt home providers to register with the state by mailing a copy of their driver's license or state identification card along with a copy of their social security number card. Illinois projects savings of \$20 million from these measures.

In addition to the \$34 million increase in general revenue funds for the CCAP, the final 2007 fiscal year budget includes an increase in the appropriation for the federal funds child care line of \$8.7 million, representing increased federal funding available to Illinois as a result of the federal budget reconciliation act.

Preschool for All

The General Assembly also fully funded the Blagojevich administration's request for \$45 million for the first year of a planned five-year expansion that would make voluntary, free part-day preschool programs available to all 3- and 4-year-olds in the state. The governor will request \$135 million in the first three years to reach 32,000 more children and will seek additional funding in the 2010 and 2011 fiscal years to reach any remaining unserved children whose parents would like them to participate.

Illinois would be the first state in the country to offer preschool to all 3- and 4-year-olds. Research shows that programs have a much greater impact, particularly with the most at-risk children, if they begin at age 3.

Preschool for All is the culmination of a multiyear effort to make preschool available to all 3- and 4-year-olds in Illinois. It builds on the past three years of \$30 million annual increases in funding for the state prekindergarten program, which has significantly expanded the program's reach.

Early in his term, Governor Blagojevich created the Illinois Early Learning Council, which, with input from more than 200 early childhood advocates, service providers, civic and law enforcement leaders, legislators and others, developed a detailed blueprint for a program. The goal of preschool for all as envisioned by the Early Learning Council is to provide high standards and quality curricula and teaching staff in a variety of settings that parents choose. These settings include schools, child care, and other community-based providers.

In addition to funding, a change in the law governing the state prekindergarten program expands eligibility. The program had been available only to children who were "at risk" of academic failure due to such risk factors as low

income, lack of English language proficiency, or developmental delays. The legislation amends the prekindergarten act so that programs primarily serving at-risk children have first priority, but other children also may receive services. Providers primarily serving children in households whose incomes are up to four times the federal poverty line (\$80,000 for a family of four) are the second priority, followed by all other providers. The law requires the Illinois State Board of Education to report on the breakdown of children who receive services each year. The law expanding eligibility beyond at-risk children will sunset in two years; the General Assembly then will need to reauthorize it. ■

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Three City Governments Open Employment Possibilities to People with Criminal Records

Leading by example, Boston, San Francisco, and Chicago are adopting policies to lower the employment barriers that people with criminal conviction records often face. These cities, like all other areas of the country, are confronting the reality that up to 97 percent of the people sent to prison in the "war on crime" are eventually released (650,000 people will be released from state and federal prisons in 2006); that they usually return to their home communities; that they always need a job to earn a living; and that 60 percent of employers will simply not hire a person with a conviction record. All three city governments' new policies deal with blanket hiring bans and aim for fair employment standards for their own hiring and that of private employers.

Boston's new city ordinance, to take effect July 1, 2006, prohibits the city government and the estimated 50,000 vendors doing business with the government from conducting criminal background checks until they find the applicant to be "otherwise" qualified for the job. Then and only then may the employer obtain criminal conviction information, and, if the applicant has a conviction history,

the ordinance directs the city and its vendors to look at more than the fact of conviction in making the final hiring decision. The ordinance instructs the employer to make the final hiring decision “based on all the information available to the City, including the seriousness of the crime(s), the relevance of the crime(s), the number of crime(s), the age of the crime(s), and the occurrences in the life of the Applicant since the crime(s).”

San Francisco’s board of supervisors revised, on October 11, 2005, the city government’s hiring procedures so as not to discourage people with conviction records from even applying for government jobs and to consider them fairly for government employment. The new procedures, effective this month, remove the inquiry about criminal conviction history from the city government’s initial employment application form. The new procedures consider conviction history only after they identify an applicant as a serious employment prospect. The new procedures apply only to city government employment.

Earlier this year Chicago issued guidelines for all city government agencies on hiring decisions when applicants have conviction records. The guidelines require city agencies to take into account the age of a person’s criminal record, the seriousness of the offense, evidence of rehabilitation, and other mitigating factors. The city government hiring policy revisions to give people with conviction records a better chance at getting city government jobs are part of Chicago’s response to a two-year study by the Mayoral Policy Caucus on Prisoner Reentry. The study, out last January, is entitled “Rebuilding Lives, Restoring Hope, Strengthening Communities: Breaking the Cycle of Incarceration and Building brighter Futures in Chicago.” The study recommended local and state initiatives on employment, health, family, and community safety issues surrounding prisoners reentering their communities.

In announcing the report and the policy change, Mayor Richard M. Daley hoped that the city government’s

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Rebuilding America’s Lower Ninth



Taking action to end poverty in every community

August 29—September 1, 2006

Hurricane Katrina alerted the nation to a state whose geography extends beyond the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans—it is the State of Poverty, America’s undeclared disaster area. From isolated rural counties to crowded urban blocks, there is a “lower ninth ward” of poverty in every community. Join the Shriver Center in a week of media outreach to promote innovative solutions to end poverty in America.

For more information on how you can join this campaign, contact us at rebuildingamerica@povertylaw.org

example would encourage private employers to be more open to hiring people with conviction records. “Implementing this new policy won’t be easy, but it is the right thing to do,” he said in response to the report. “We cannot ask private employers to consider hiring former prisoners unless the City practices what it preaches,” he added. ■

For more information, contact Margaret Stapleton at mstapleton@povertylaw.org or 312.368.3327.

Comments, letters and general feedback about *Poverty Action Report* should be sent to the editor, Rikeesha Cannon at 312.368.2677 or rikeeshacannon@povertylaw.org

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