The Honorable J.B. Pritzker
Governor of the State of Illinois
Office of the Governor
James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph, 16-100
Chicago, IL 60601
Gov.COVID19stakeholder@illinois.gov

Re: Recommendations for State Legislative Actions in Response to COVID-19

Dear Governor Pritzker:

Thank you for your leadership on protecting Illinois residents in the face of COVID-19. We appreciate the steps the Governor’s Office and the General Assembly is taking to respond to this emergency. We represent communities likely to experience the harshest health, housing, family, criminal legal, and economic impact from this crisis. There are actions that must be taken immediately to ensure the well-being of our most vulnerable and at-risk populations. We stand ready to help our communities and our government in any way we can.

In response to COVID-19, the Shriver Center on Poverty Law has revised our legislative agenda. These recommendations for state legislative actions concentrate on critical measures to protect low-income families and communities throughout the state. On behalf of the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, we urge you to include these initiatives in the budget or the emergency omnibus bill the General Assembly puts forth to fight COVID-19.

Support Working Families

- **SB 471 - Healthy Workplace Act** *(Sen. Lightford, Rep. Gordon-Booth)* The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for Illinois to enact SB 471, the Healthy Workplace Act, legislation that would ensure that Illinois workers have access to at least 40 hours of sick leave. Currently, there are 1.5 million, mostly low-wage, workers in Illinois with no access to even a single paid sick day. And for those who do, many can be fired for using this benefit. It is time for Illinois to act and ensure that all workers have access to at least a minimal amount of sick leave, as provided in SB 471. In addition, since there is an immediate need for emergency paid sick leave for all workers, including gig economy workers, temporary workers, domestic workers and undocumented workers, an amendment to SB 471 that provides 20 days of leave that may be renewed for reasons related to the current crisis, as follows, is required. This leave would start once the paid sick leave provided under federal emergency laws has been exhausted. Any leave associated with this emergency must be job guaranteed. When an employer reopens for
business and/or restores hours of operation, or an employee is able to return to work after taking leave, an employee must be restored to their original job or to an equivalent job with equivalent pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment. Further, employers must not be allowed to interfere with, restrain, deny, change work days or hours scheduled to avoid paying sick time, or discipline an employee for the exercise of, or the attempt to exercise, any right to sick leave, including considering the use of sick leave as a negative factor in an employment action that involves hiring, terminating, evaluating, promoting, disciplining, or counting the paid sick time under a no-fault attendance policy. Employers must also be required to continue group health insurance coverage for an employee on leave under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave.

- **Legislation that forbids employers from any form of retaliation against all workers, including gig economy workers, temporary workers, domestic workers and undocumented workers, because of the following:**
  (a) The individual has a current diagnosis of COVID-19
  (b) The individual is under quarantine (including self-imposed quarantine)
  (c) The individual is engaged in caregiving for an individual who has a current diagnosis of COVID-19 or is under quarantine (including self-imposed quarantine)
  (d) The individual is engaged in caregiving because of the COVID-19 related closing of a school or other care facility or care program, for a child or other individual unable to provide self-care
  (e) The individual informally or formally complained or brought to the attention to any staff member, or any other individual, in any manner health and/or safety concerns related to COVID-19

- **Provide masks and other safety equipment to all other types of workers on the frontlines of the COVID-19 outbreak** - Along with healthcare professionals, grocery store, domestic workers, including caregivers, housecleaners, and nannies, and other essential workers are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 outbreak. They support all of us, including some of the most at-risk populations, particularly older people, young children and the range of people with compromised immune systems. As such, they should be provided with masks and other safety equipment, rather than having to worry about where they will get them. They should be offered free testing and treatment for coronavirus. The government should distribute prevention materials in the many languages that workers speak.

- **Use state funds to pay unemployment insurance to undocumented workers who otherwise would qualify for regular or pandemic unemployment but for their immigration status. Ensure that these payments are not subject to state taxation.** Many undocumented workers are losing their jobs due to COVID-19, but do not qualify for unemployment insurance. The state should fund benefits for these workers using state funds, and because they are emergency benefits to meet immediate needs should not subject them to state taxation.

- **Ensure that the one-time federal stimulus checks are not subject to state taxation and require the Illinois Department of Human Services to disregard them as income**
Emergency payments made to families during this global pandemic are necessary to meet immediate needs. Families who receive them should not have to essentially repay a portion of the assistance by having it taxed by the State of Illinois. They should also not face a reduction in SNAP or TANF benefits due to these payments.

- **SB 3376 - Ending Driver’s License Suspension for Unpaid Red-Light Camera Tickets** *(Sen. Villanueva)* This bill could be expanded so that there are no license suspensions for non-safety driving violations and driver’s licenses that are suspended for financial reasons are reinstated. Driver’s license suspension should not be used to punish people for their poverty. By suspending licenses for financial reasons Illinois takes away people’s ability to get to and from work. Transportation is critical for employment and opportunity, and when licenses are taken away from good drivers and workers, we all lose – job seekers, workers, employers and the taxpayers paying to enforce counterproductive policies. Considering the current crisis, Illinois must do all it can to help support individuals and their financial recovery. Allowing individuals to recover their driver’s license without having to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars will allow families to recover faster and more easily.

** Affordable Healthcare for Our Most Vulnerable **

- **HB 4891 / SB 3703 - Healthy Illinois** *(Rep. Ramirez, Sen. Aquino)* COVID-19 shines a spotlight on what happens when an entire low-income population—namely low-income adult immigrants—has been excluded by design from Medicaid. This bill creates a pathway to health coverage for all low-income Illinoisans and is critical to keeping all communities healthy in the face of COVID-19. If implemented fully, the bill extends Medicaid eligibility to all low-income Illinois residents aged 19 and older, with household incomes of up to 138% FPL regardless of their immigration status. *Healthy Illinois For All* would cover approximately 93,000 Illinois residents with comprehensive health insurance. This could be phased in starting with approximately 8,000 older adults (aged 50 and older) or approximately 500 seniors (aged 65 and older) during this General Assembly session and ramping up to the full population starting in 2021.

- **SB 3161 - Navigator Program** *(Sen. Gillespie)* This bill paired with the added funds ($4.5 million) in the Governor’s proposed budget will provide essential enrollment assistance to help uninsured people enroll in available health insurance (Medicaid/Marketplace) and other public benefits. This is extremely important during this public health crisis when low income uninsured individuals are most vulnerable to not getting the health care and services they need. It’s especially vital considering that DHS local offices are closed or have limited hours, so individuals are relying on online or telephonic methods to apply for coverage and will need assistance from trusted, trained, expert application assisters in their communities.

** Ensure Equitable Housing Practices **
• **Issue a moratorium on all residential evictions, foreclosures, and tax sales** – The safest place for people to be during the pandemic is in their homes, and the Governor’s shelter-in-place order—which is necessary to protect the public health—has put many people out of work, and unable to pay rent. A complete moratorium, protecting tenants at all stages of the eviction process, will ensure that everyone has a place to call home during the crisis; the legislation should also prohibit landlords from enforcing penalties—such as late fees—that will exacerbate the already severe rent burden. The legislature should also issue a similar moratorium on all residential foreclosure proceedings and tax sales and create a rental assistance fund to support landlords whose tenants are unable to pay rent. Finally, the legislature should impose financial penalties on landlords who ignore the moratorium and perform a self-help eviction, while sealing eviction and foreclosure cases filed in the six months following the end of the moratorium so that renters are not burdened with an eviction record.

• **Funding to support people experiencing homelessness or returning from corrections facilities and create new, temporary housing to enable social distancing and quarantine** – People experiencing homelessness are at high-risk for contracting and spreading COVID-19. The state should provide additional support to homeless service providers to ensure that shelters are clean, safe, and sanitary for both residents and staff and that they are taking social distancing precautions. Funding should also be used to rapidly house people experiencing homelessness, by increasing funding to the IDHA rental housing support program, and appropriating money to support local efforts to provide temporary housing. In particular, the legislature should create a new program or re-allocate the funding from the statewide Re-Entry Pilot to ensure that citizens returning from incarceration are immediately housed.

• **Protect Illinoisans from discrimination** – Sadly, many people, including the U.S. President, have associated COVID-19 with Asian countries, and discrimination is spiking as a result. In addition, people infected with, or perceived to be infected with, COVID-19 or people at risk for COVID-19 (including citizens returning from incarceration and those who have recently experienced homelessness) will likely face discrimination as well. The legislature should add a protected class to the Illinois Human Rights Act, protecting individuals with, perceived to have, or at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 from housing and employment discrimination.

We remain ready to help you and the state of Illinois protect all Illinois residents, including its most vulnerable. Please let us know if you have any questions on these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Kate Waltz
Vice President of Advocacy