

The Impact of Advocacy in a Pandemic

May 19, 2020

Shriver
Center on
Poverty
Law

You Fuel Our Fight For Economic & Racial Justice

Thank you for your support!

Audra Wilson Named New President & CEO of the Shriver Center



povertylaw.org/newCEO

**Kate Walz, Vice President of Advocacy &
Senior Director of Litigation
Shriver Center on Poverty Law**



Response to COVID-19

Crisis Advocacy for Systemic Change

povertylaw.org/covid19

Today's Agenda

- **Current Landscape & Overview of Our Advocacy**
 - Kate Walz, Vice President of Advocacy
- **Sheltering in Place When You Are Housing Unstable**
 - Emily Coffey, Housing Justice Staff Attorney
- **It's Good Help If You Can Get It: Public Benefits and Unemployment Insurance**
 - Jeremy Rosen, Director of Economic Justice
- **Keeping Families Intact: Life in the Child Welfare System During a Crisis**
 - Tanya Gassenheimer, Community Justice Staff Attorney
- Audience Q & A
- Take Action & Close

Current Landscape: Challenges and Opportunities

- 30 million people have sought unemployment to date.
- Low-wage workers are both essential and disposable.
- One-third of Americans did not pay rent in April.
- Healthcare access remains a challenge, especially for those without legal status.
- The criminal legal system makes it impossible for people to socially distance.
- COVID-19 lays bare longstanding structural racism.

The Shriver Center in Action

- Identifying what low-income and communities of color need to be economically secure, healthy, housed, and free from discrimination;
- Advocating at the local, state, and federal level for immediate *and long-term reform*;
- Why policy advocacy matters.

**Emily Coffey, Staff Attorney, Housing Justice
Shriver Center on Poverty Law**

The housing crisis we have today was largely there before the crisis.

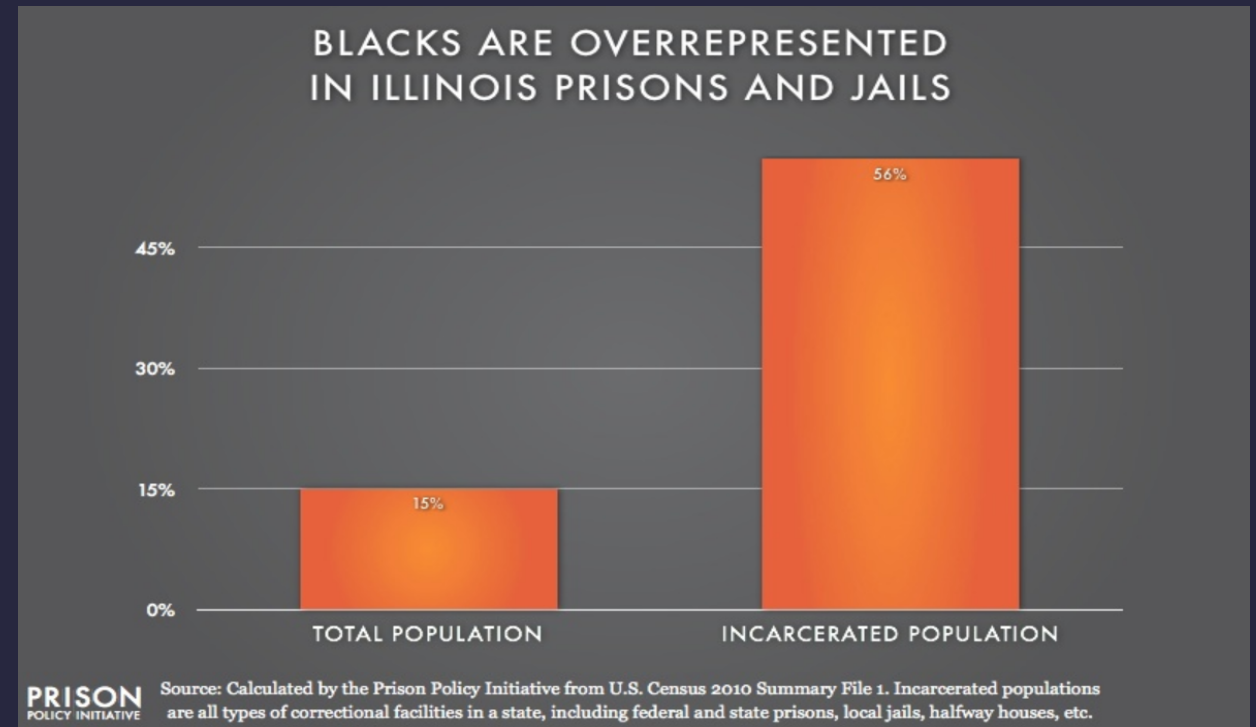
- Black and brown communities disproportionately experience housing instability and 1 out of 5 black households nationally have a net worth of zero or less.
- Housing discrimination is the norm for returning citizens and individuals who have had contact with the criminal legal system.
- Addressing housing access & affordability now and for the long term is critical to protecting the public health and addressing systemic racism.

The Looming Eviction and Foreclosure Cliff

- If moratoriums end without comprehensive relief, evictions and foreclosures will rise precipitously;
- Funds plus a slow down of the foreclosure and eviction processes are critical.

The intersection of the criminal legal and housing systems creates the perfect storm of racial inequity.

- Blanket Bans;
- Lack of viable host sites;
- Families unable to reunite;
- Critical to disconnect systems, designate housing funding, and reunify families



Solutions for Systems Change

- COVID-19 Emergency and Economic Recovery Renter and Homeowner Protection Act (HB5574, HA1)
- Expanded re-entry pilot program
- Public Housing Authority waivers to increase housing access and keep families housed

Jeremy Rosen, Director of Economic Justice Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Public Benefit Systems Were Fundamentally Broken Before COVID-19

- Long lines at outdated offices
- Poor technology (80's computers and faxes)
 - Inability to adapt to new technology
- Disproportionate impact on people of color
 - Accepted by most people not impacted

March and April 2020 – The Need Explodes

- SNAP applications up 400 percent at peak
- Unemployment claims
 - Spring 2019 – 61,000
 - Spring 2020 – 755,000
 - Loss of employer provided health care
- Federal stimulus checks sent – 500,000 immigrants in Illinois not eligible

March and April – Systems Are Challenged

- All IDHS offices close; caseworkers at home with laptops
- Unemployment offices shuttered; phone lines and website overwhelmed, language access barriers unaddressed
- Issues hit home for middle class

Shriver Solutions: Help In A Time Of Crisis

- More money for people who need it
 - Extra SNAP, \$600 a week in UI, faster Medicaid eligibility
 - State funded cash payments for immigrants
 - Federal fiscal relief to keep state budget strong
- Waivers, waivers, waivers
- Information sharing; HelpHub, resource page, webinars, fact sheets

Shriver Solutions: Systems Change

- Fair tax
- Reimagining our public benefits system
- Simplifying current programs

Tanya Gassenheimer, Staff Attorney,
Community Justice
Shriver Center on Poverty Law



FEDERAL CONTEXT

- [Adoption and Safe Families Act – 42 U.S.C. 675\(5\)\(E\)](#)
 - (E) in the case of a child who has been in foster care . . . for 15 of the most recent 22 months . . . the State SHALL file a petition to terminate the parental rights of the child’s parents. . .
 - What does this mandate mean in a pandemic?
- [Children’s Bureau letter:](#)
 - Court: hearings that must continue, “Refrain from making sweeping, blanket orders ceasing suspending, or postponing court”
 - Family time: “Discourage or refrain from issuing blanket court orders reducing or suspending family”
 - Services

- **Gov. Pritzker's Order: Essential Activities:**
 - Healthcare
 - Caring for others, including family
 - Human services: DCFS
 - Essential Government Functions: child protection and child welfare personnel
 - Essential Travel
- **Judge Evans' Administrative Order**
 - TC hearings and emergency motions

And yet...

- In practice, TCs continuing but nothing else
- Programs closed, not documented in Service Plans
- Visits suspended by DCFS policy, virtual not being facilitated

What does this mean for parents?

- Disproportionality of pandemic's impact on communities of color, who are overrepresented in the foster system
- Trauma on parents and children
- Penalized in legal cases, barrier to reunification
- Overlay of federal mandate
- Permanent/lifelong consequences

Responses

- Local Phase I – engaging with DCFS directly
 - [Our letter](#), PD letter, DCFS response
 - TX, jurisdiction in Canada, others followed suit
- Local Phase II – adding pressure
 - Media
 - Political
 - Supporting PD lawsuit
- Federal advocacy

Audience Q&A

Send questions via Chat

Take Action Today

- **Fuel our Work**
 - www.povertylaw.org.org/donate
- **Talk to Your Legislators About Our Agenda**
 - <https://www.povertylaw.org/get-involved/take-action/>
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