



## **For economic and racial justice**

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### **Support Illinois' Road to Recovery** **May 2020**

**Everyone deserves access to quality healthcare, equal work for equal pay, and the power to determine their own futures—regardless of race or where they came from. As we look to the future, we need to advocate for systemic change that ensures that everyone's basic needs are met.**

Illinois' road to recovery may be long and bumpy, but it is a journey we are all in together. With the General Assembly reconvening this week, there are actions that must be taken immediately to ensure the well-being of our most vulnerable and at-risk populations. More than ever, we need to work toward systemic change that ensures fair and equitable policies. We believe a road to recovery includes access to healthcare, support for workers, and protections for renters and homeowners. These initiatives provide immediate relief while fostering a structure for permanent policies that lead to a comprehensive response to COVID-19.

**On behalf of the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, we urge the General Assembly to include these measures in the budget and/or emergency omnibus bill to protect low-income families and communities throughout the state in the fight against COVID-19.**

#### **Access to Healthcare**

**HB 4891 / SB 3703 (Rep. Ramirez, Sen. Aquino) Healthy Illinois** extends Medicaid eligibility to all low-income Illinois residents aged 19 and older with household incomes of up to 138% FPL, regardless of immigration status. COVID-19 lays bare historic racial, ethnic, and income inequities in access to health care. Undocumented immigrants—millions of whom are serving on the frontlines as “essential workers”—face incredible barriers to health care, from uncertain coverage of testing and treatment to fear of immigration consequences. We cannot continue to accept health care disparities as normal and inevitable. As the state faces uncertain budgetary constraints, an immediate response would be to cover the population most at risk for complications and adverse outcomes from COVID-19 – seniors aged 60 and older – while continuing to work towards implementing holistic solutions that will reduce inequities and create healthier and more equitable communities in the aftermath of COVID-19.

#### **Support Workers**

**SB 471 (Sen. Lightford, Rep. Gordon-Booth) Healthy Workplace Act** ensures 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. This means workers are going to work when they are not well and potentially infecting those around them. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for a short and long-term solution for all workers to have

at least a minimal amount of sick leave to use without fear of a loss of income or their jobs. **Emergency paid sick leave** is an immediate response to COVID-19 for all workers, including gig economy workers, temporary workers, domestic workers, and undocumented workers to have at least 20 days of leave. This leave would start once the paid sick leave provided under federal emergency laws has been exhausted and include: a job guarantee for any leave associated with the pandemic, protections against retaliation for taking paid sick leave, and a requirement for employers to continue the same group health insurance coverage while the employee is on leave as the employee would have had if not taken leave.

**SB 3376 (Sen. Villanueva) Ending Driver’s License Suspension for Unpaid Red-Light Camera Tickets** eliminates driver’s license suspensions for failure to pay red light camera tickets and restores licenses previously suspended due to these debts. In this unprecedented time, Illinois must do all it can to help support individuals and their financial recovery. COVID-19 relief should come in the form of expanding SB 3376 to end license suspensions for all non-safety driving violations and reinstate driver’s licenses that are currently suspended for financial reasons. By suspending licenses for financial reasons, Illinois takes away people’s ability to get to and from work safely. Decreasing the number of people that must use public transportation eases public health concerns and can aid in diminishing the spread of COVID-19. Transportation is critical for employment and opportunity, and when licenses are taken away, we all lose – job seekers, workers, employers, and the taxpayers paying to enforce counterproductive policies. Allowing individuals to recover their driver’s license without having to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars will allow families and the state to recover faster and more easily.

**HB 5669 / SB 3429 (Rep. Welch, Sen. Steans) Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit** to include 18- to 24-year-old childless adults and all immigrants who file taxes using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). The bill helps over-taxed low-income workers get a cost of living refund. To address COVID-19’s impact and the gaps left unaddressed by the federal government’s response, we are now proposing providing a state-funded benefit this year to families in Illinois who are ITIN tax filers and extending eligibility for the Illinois Earned Income Credit to ITIN tax filers starting with the 2020 tax year.

## **Protect Renters and Homeowners**

**HB 5574, HA 1 (Rep. Ramirez, Sen. Peters) COVID-19 Emergency Economic Recovery Renter and Homeowner Protection Act** provides temporary relief and protections to renters, homeowners, and persons in need of housing during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. The bill extends the moratorium on residential and small business commercial evictions, provides relief to landlords who have tenants struggling to pay rent due to a COVID-19 hardship, gives homeowners relief by deferring mortgage payments and eliminating fees, and provides tenants with protections in this time of crisis to alleviate the uncertainty and fear of losing their home. The Act sunsets at the end of the economic crisis.

**State Budget Appropriation of the CARES Act Funding** provides dollars to state and local governments to be used to pay for new COVID-19-related expenses from March 1, 2020 to

December 30, 2020. Due to this public health emergency, many Illinoisans have suffered a sudden and unexpected loss of income, which has left individuals and families vulnerable to evictions and foreclosures. The Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) made a request for \$225 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds to provide rent and mortgage assistance, as well as a small amount for gap financing for the completion of rental development projects. Funding from the Coronavirus Relief Fund to IHDA for housing assistance will aid in providing relief for those with an inability to pay their rent or mortgage due to the economic impact of COVID-19.

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