



## Children's Advocates for Change 2023 Legislative Agenda

Children's Advocates for Change's (CAFC) mission is to see that all Illinois children receive the necessary services and resources to be educated, healthy, and thriving regardless of their race, ethnicity, or zip code. Through data collection and analysis, CAFC documents their well-being and advocates for needed resources.

### **Equity**

As legislators begin crafting a state budget for Fiscal Year 2024, equity needs to be at the center of the conversation. While the state's employment picture continues to improve (according to the state's unemployment rate) the unemployment rate for Black residents versus white residents remains consistently higher. Illinois needs to continue the path of investments in underserved communities and job training for residents of those communities. To that end, CAFC legislative agenda will concentrate on:

#### **(1) Equity Budgeting ([HB 3748](#))**

While the Governor annually presents a budget to the General Assembly with an introduction that highlights major investments and trends, the state needs to specifically include a statement on how the budget promotes racial and ethnic equity within the state. The use of a race equity lens during budget deliberations points out the racial and ethnic disparities that continue to plague us, raises the questions of why those disparities exist, and prompts the question of how the state – through the provision of goods and services – is addressing those inequities.

#### **(2) Training on Producing Racial Impact Notes ([HB 3941](#))**

A key element to equity, is also utilizing the state's Racial Impact Note Act (25 ILCS 83). The Act allows a legislator to request prior to the second reading of a substantive bill that has or could have a disparate impact on racial and ethnic minorities that a state agency, for a board or commission to prepare a "brief explanatory statement or note that shall include a reliable estimate of the anticipated impact on those racial and ethnic minorities likely to be impacted by the bill". The Act stipulates requirements for the statement. However, legislators have used the law sparingly and there does not seem to be any consistency in their preparation.

CAFC proposes legislation requiring the Governor's office to submit a report by year's end on recommendations regarding the production of racial impact note that would examine methodology, formatting, and a course of training for personnel required to produce such notes. This measure should improve the quality and effectiveness of the produced notes which are valuable tools in raising questions about legislation that could increase existing disparities and reduce opportunities for all citizens to thrive.

### **Economic Opportunity**

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit Black, Hispanic, and Latino households harder than other Illinois households whether it is regarding health, education, or economic circumstances. The one-year enhancement of the federal child (combined with other federal COVID-19 economic relief measures) showed how effective the measure can be in reducing child poverty -reducing child poverty by nearly 50% nationally. In Illinois, according to the Supplemental Child Poverty Measure, there were 85,000 fewer Illinois children in poverty from 2020 to 2021.

Yet, a November 2022 U.S. Census Bureau survey indicated 36% of Illinois households with children faced a condition of children not eating enough because food was unaffordable. As of December, inflation was running 6.5% on an annual basis. That's lower than the mid-year peak of 9.1% but still making life difficult for low- and moderate-income families across the state.

**(1) State Child Tax Credit ([SB 1444](#), [HB 3950](#))**

To help these working families, Illinois needs to adopt a state child tax credit. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 12 states have enacted state child tax credits. In nine of the 12 states, the credit is refundable. Such a credit helps Illinois families meet basic household needs and adds greater progressivity into the state's tax system.

**(2) Renter's Income Tax Credit ([SB 1836](#), [HB 2429](#))**

U.S. Census Data clearly shows that a far greater percentage of lower-income households pay more than 30% of their income on rent versus higher-income households. A far higher percentage of Illinois Blacks rent versus own housing units (61% of Blacks rent versus 25% of non-Latinx whites)<sup>1</sup>. Yet, the state's property tax credit benefits homeowners.

This legislation creates a state income tax credit for renters. The credit would be worth of 5% of documented rental costs for a dwelling used by the taxpayer as a principal place of residence. To qualify, a taxpayer must have lived in Illinois for at least half the year, have federal adjusted gross income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, and rental payments must exceed 30% of the taxpayer's federal adjusted gross income.

**Appropriation Measures**

While the measures above represent substantive legislation, CAFC is also looking to improve the well-being of Illinois children and families through appropriations measures.

**(1) Youth Mental Health**

In November 2022, the state launched a \$2.5 million federal funded program to help healthcare providers meet the mental health needs of children. However, as CAFC noted in its 2022 webinar on youth mental health needs, it is important to establish and expand school-based mental health services. The federal Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Congress approved last year included new funding for school-based mental health services. The State Fiscal Year 2024 budget needs to increase funding to meet student mental health needs that have only increased during the pandemic.

**(2) Infant and Maternal Mortality Funding**

CAFC's Infant and Maternal Mortality webinar examined state and national disparities in infant and maternal mortality. While receiving new federal funding to address maternal health, Illinois needs to maintain its commitment through General Revenue Funds to building a vigorous community health worker system, expanding home visiting programs, and ensuring the programming designed to meet the existing requirement for healthcare professions to complete implicit bias awareness training is strong with follow-up research on its effectiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> 2019 5-year American Community Survey Data, U.S. Census Bureau