

Coming Soon!

The Illinois Equal Justice Foundation has embarked on a Return on Investment (ROI) Study to evaluate the economic impact of the state's investment in civil legal aid. The ROI Study is being conducted by the Heartland Alliance's Social IMPACT Research Center, in partnership with the Chicago Bar Foundation. Additional support for this project comes from the Polk Bros. Foundation, the Illinois Bar Foundation and the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois. Study results will be available in early April. We look forward to sharing this data with you soon!

EQUAL JUSTICE ILLINOIS CAMPAIGN
180 N. Stetson Ave.
Suite 820
Chicago, IL 60601



For more information, please contact:

Leslie Corbett, Executive Director
Illinois Equal Justice Foundation
180 N. Stetson, Suite 820
Chicago, IL 60601

312-938-2381
lcorbett@iejf.org

Or visit:
www.equaljusticeillinois.org
www.iejf.org

EQUAL JUSTICE ILLINOIS CAMPAIGN

SPRING 2012

THE SUBURBANIZATION OF POVERTY

According to the Heartland Alliance Social IMPACT Research Center's 2011 Report on Illinois Poverty, one out of every three Illinoisans is now considered poor or low-income. The Chicago region – including the city of Chicago, suburban Cook County, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will Counties – is home to over 2.5 million people living in poverty. In stark contrast to the popular image of suburbs as overwhelmingly affluent areas, the suburbs have become home to the largest and fastest-growing population of poor residents in the country. Poverty is no longer a primarily urban problem, and policymakers are struggling to come to terms with the implications.

Suburban and urban poverty has increased in the Midwest over the past decade as manufacturing jobs and traditional blue-collar jobs have disappeared. In Chicago, gentrification of many previously poor and working-class neighborhoods, as well as the relocation and disproportionate loss of many lower-skilled jobs, have led to tremendous population changes. Many poor residents have left the city in search of affordable housing and/or employment, only to find a lack of transportation and social service resources in the suburbs.

Challenge to Serve a Sprawling and Changing Region

Social service providers and legal aid organizations have been unable to keep up with the scope and speed of these changes in the geographic distribution of poverty. DuPage County, one of the wealthier areas in the state, now has the busiest office of the Illinois Department of Human Services, which provides food, housing and other assistance.

Suburban enrollment in the Medicaid program has spiked since 2006 and illustrates the true extent of the suburbanization of poverty. According to data from the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, Chicago's collar counties have seen a massive jump in the numbers of Medicaid recipients: 89 percent in DuPage County, 76 percent in Kane, 103 percent in McHenry, 73 percent in Lake and



84 percent in Will. These increases compare to the 19 percent increase in Cook County and the state's otherwise staggering 30 percent growth in Medicaid enrollment during the same period.

Prairie State Legal Services (PSLS) has been on the front lines of the meteoric rise in poverty in Chicago's collar counties. A longstanding IEJF grantee, PSLS is charged with providing civil legal services in all 36 counties of northern and central Illinois, except Cook County. PSLS relies heavily on funding from the federal Legal Services Corporation (LSC), which saw its budget slashed 15 percent by Congress this year. PSLS will receive approximately \$600,000 less from LSC this coming fiscal year. This follows a year of layoffs, closure of an office in Galesburg and service cuts. According to Executive Director Michael O'Connor, "The situation is going to get pretty dire when it comes to 2013 and will, inevitably, mean service reductions at a time when poverty is at an all-time high."

Much of the increase in suburban poverty is among Spanish speakers, and legal aid programs are scrambling to devise ways to serve this rapidly growing population. IEJF grantees Illinois Legal Aid Online (ILAO) and the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago recently launched a Spanish-language mirrored version of ILAO's website (<http://ayudalegalil.org>) to provide statewide access to legal information and documents to this underserved population.

continued inside...

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

The Equal Justice Illinois Campaign is a bi-partisan coalition of state leaders working to increase state funding for civil legal aid so that all Illinois residents – regardless of income – have access to the court system. The Campaign is a project of the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation, the organization charged with distributing the state appropriation for civil legal aid.

The legal aid system in Illinois currently operates near the breaking point. There are fewer than 400 legal aid lawyers to assist the more than 1.7 million Illinois residents living in poverty. Federal funding for legal aid was cut 15 percent this year, with Illinois losing \$2 million. Of the 10 most populous states, Illinois ranks ninth when it comes to legal aid funding, spending \$1.75 million, compared to an average of \$11.7 million.

The Equal Justice Illinois Campaign calls on the state to maintain level funding for civil legal aid so this critical safety net continues to function. For more information, visit www.equaljusticeillinois.org.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT: GRANTEES WORKING IN COLLABORATION ON WAGE THEFT ISSUES

In 2011, the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation expanded its grant roster to include the **Working Hands Legal Clinic** (WHLC). Specifically, the IEJF funded WHLC's public information partnership with the Mexican Consulate to educate people on their labor rights and available remedies if those rights are violated. The project reached over 3,200 people via outposts at the Consulate's Chicago office and the mobile consulate that regularly travels throughout northern Illinois.

The WHLC came to our attention via their successful legislative efforts to amend the **Illinois Wage Payment Collection Act** (IWPCA) to better address the issue of wage theft. According to a 2010 report by the University of Illinois at Chicago's Center for Urban Economic Development, wage theft has reached epidemic proportions, causing Chicago workers to lose an astounding \$7.3 million in wages every week. Wage theft inordinately impacts low-wage and particularly vulnerable groups of workers such as temporary staffers, day laborers, immigrants and people with criminal records trying to re-enter the work force.



Under the auspices of the **Just Pay for All Coalition**, WHLC, along with the **Latino Union**, the Chicago Workers' Collaborative, Centro de Trabajadores Unidos and the Immigrant Workers Project worked to draft and pass Senate Bill 3568, which added five amendments to the IWPCA. These amendments dramatically increased civil and criminal penalties to deter wage theft, especially for repeat offenders, while also creating an administrative small claims process to allow victims of wage theft to prosecute their own claims efficiently and effectively. Key supporters of this legislation included Senator William Delgado (D, 2nd District) and Representative Lisa Hernandez (D, 24th District). SB 3568 was signed into law by Governor Quinn on June 30, 2010.

To ensure the amendments to the IWPCA were effectively implemented, the Just Pay for All Coalition worked for 10 months in collaboration with the Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL) to pass emergency rules effective January 1, 2011. This action strengthened protections against wage theft for all 6 million Illinois workers one year after the bill was passed.

This year, the IEJF awarded the Just Pay for All Coalition a grant (via fiscal agent Latino Union) to educate low-wage workers across the state about these new protections through community trainings and the development and dissemination of written materials.

Additionally, IEJF grantee **Illinois Legal Aid Online** is working with WHLC and the IDOL to automate the state wage claim forms and include a worksheet with a built-in wage calculator. These forms are expected to debut on www.illinoislegalaid.org this spring.

...continued from front SUBURBANIZATION OF POVERTY

The state legal aid safety net is being stretched well beyond its limits and faces the daunting mission of serving a larger and more geographically dispersed population in dire need of assistance. This makes the campaign to maintain level state funding for civil legal aid even more critical. **Attorney General Madigan has pledged her support for level funding of \$1.75 million for the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation. We call on the General Assembly to follow her lead on this important issue.**



Suburban legal aid organizations and social service providers like this Hoffman Estates food bank have had to significantly stretch their resources in order to meet the needs of a growing number of suburban residents in poverty.

BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE MEMBER PROFILE

Jeff Schoenberg (D),
Senator, 9th District



Senator Schoenberg began his accomplished career in state politics when he was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives in 1989. He has served as a champion for state legal aid funding since 2005. He sponsored the bill to increase the appropriation to \$2 million and to move the appropriation to the Attorney General's budget from the Department of Human Services. He will retire from the Senate at the end of this term. We wish him well and thank him for his dedication to increasing access to justice.

Will you continue to be a champion for civil legal aid in the private sector? Absolutely, my commitment to equality in the administration of justice in our society is a cornerstone of my values system.

What motivated you to get involved with the Equal Justice Illinois Campaign to increase the state appropriation for civil legal aid?

Giving people the tools they need to navigate our complex justice system in times of crisis is essential to fulfilling our state's promise of both equal rights and equal protection under the law, regardless of one's economic status. Illinois still lags behind many other states in the amount appropriated for legal aid, which places increasing numbers of people at a disadvantage in exercising their legal rights.

How does the work of legal aid organizations impact your constituents?

In an economy that is recovering slowly, many of my constituents have found themselves in need of legal aid – the homeless, victims of abuse, and victims of domestic violence, but also families facing foreclosure and other housing problems, as well as individuals who might previously have been able to afford legal help but are now in desperate need of assistance but cannot pay.

When you talk to your fellow legislators about the importance of state funding for legal aid, what is your 30-second elevator speech?

These relatively modest investments in legal aid make an immediate, measurable impact in people's lives. It's a way to empower people to protect themselves from domestic violence, exploitation, discrimination and homelessness.

IEJF FY 12 GRANT AWARDS

The Illinois Equal Justice Foundation awarded \$1.66 million in grants to 17 not-for-profit organizations assisting residents facing critical legal challenges throughout the state. Please visit www.iejf.org for more information about the IEJF's grant program.

Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation (Alton, Champaign, East St. Louis, Carbondale and Springfield) (\$367,000)

Prairie State Legal Services (Bloomington, Galesburg, Joliet, Kankakee, McHenry, Ottawa, Peoria, Rockford, Rock Island, St. Charles and Waukegan) (\$356,700)

Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (Cook County) (\$194,000)

Coordinated Advice & Referral Program for Legal Services (Cook County) (\$189,000)

Illinois Legal Aid Online (Statewide) (\$114,000)

Equip for Equality (Chicago, Rock Island, Carbondale and Springfield) (\$110,000)

Center for Conflict Resolution (Cook County) (\$75,000)

Chicago Legal Clinic (Cook County) (\$70,000)

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services (Cook County) (\$70,000)

Kankakee Center for Conflict Resolution of the John R. Tate Advocacy Center (Kankakee) (\$29,000)

Cabrini Green Legal Aid (Chicago) (\$26,000)

Dispute Resolution Institute (Carbondale) (\$25,000)

Lawyers' Committee for Better Housing (Chicago) (\$10,000)

Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services (Cook County) (\$10,000)

Working Hands Legal Clinic (Chicago) (\$9,000)

Latino Union (Statewide) (\$5,000)

Southern Illinois University School of Law Foundation (Carbondale) (\$2,800)

EQUAL JUSTICE ILLINOIS CAMPAIGN BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE

James R. Thompson, Chair, Former Governor

Philip J. Rock, Chair, Former Senate President

Linda Renee Baker, Professor, Paul Simon Public Policy Institute, Southern Illinois University

Patricia R. Bellock, State Representative, 47th District

Dorothy Brown, Clerk, Circuit Court of Cook County

James Buda, General Counsel, Caterpillar Inc.

Robert Clifford, President, The Chicago Bar Association

Philip Harnett Corboy, Jr., Corboy & Demetrio

Jerry Costello, U.S. Congressman, 12th District

Joseph Dailing, Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice

Ken Dunkin, State Representative, 5th District

Timothy Evans, Chief Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County

Karen Hasara, President, Illinois Equal Justice Foundation

Janet Holmgren, Chief Judge, 17th Judicial Circuit

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