

A Call for Responsible Leadership

June 17th, 2009

Governor Quinn, Leader Cross, President Cullerton, Speaker Madigan, and Leader Radogno:

When the Illinois General Assembly left Springfield on June 1st, they departed the Capitol with their job undone and their obligations unmet. Members of both parties have a shared responsibility to enact a budget that meets the state's moral and legal obligation to protect public safety, safeguard public health, strengthen our economy, and ensure every child has the educational opportunity they deserve. Yet members of both parties failed to enact a budget that supports the responsible management and delivery of vital services both within state government and through our community-based program partners in every corner of the state.

Privately, lawmakers from both parties recognize the need to raise additional revenue due to both the downturn in state revenues caused by the current economic crisis and a state structural budget deficit that dates back over several administrations. But publicly, both parties have failed to step up to the plate and do what is necessary, instead leaving a massive budget hole and resorting to political finger-pointing about who is to blame.

Now, as we approach the new fiscal year, we call on legislative leaders from both parties to set aside partisan politics and work together to craft a responsible budget, recognizing that:

It is morally irresponsible to hold Illinois families hostage to political games: *The appropriation bills approved by the legislature arbitrarily cut both grant and operational funding for many public services by fifty percent or more. As a consequence, Illinois families who depend on those services and the communities they live in throughout the state are being held hostage to politics. Seniors needing pharmaceutical assistance, women and children who have been victims of sexual assault, those with developmental disabilities and mental illness, working families needing health coverage and child care, college students, working parents in need of affordable child care, foster children and their families and many, many others are being told state government no longer works for them. It is morally unacceptable to use such trauma and potential havoc to advance individual political agendas.*

Cutting the budget for needed public services is irresponsible in the current circumstances: *The worst economic downturn in memory and the highest unemployment rate in decades mean that the need for state supported services is greater than ever. To substantially reduce funding for those services, even given the state's strained finances, is to default on the state's constitutional obligations to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the people. The need for health care, education, income assistance and family services, among others, is increasing and state support for them should as well. Further, study-after-study shows that every dollar invested in the state's prevention programs saves taxpayers an average of \$6 to \$8 down the road. Cutting vital preventative services will cost taxpayers more in the long run.*

There is a responsible solution: *Many lawmakers have recognized these imperatives and have shouldered their responsibilities. The Illinois State Senate approved a revenue plan that would have funded the state's critical human needs, addressed its long-term structural deficit, and provided relief from regressive taxation. That plan was endorsed by the Governor and approved by a committee of the Illinois House, yet it was never called for a vote before that chamber adjourned. Illinois legislators need to return to Springfield and enact an adequate revenue plan to fully fund needed state services and operations along these lines before the new fiscal years starts on July 1.*

A Call for Responsible Leadership Signatories

(List in formation)

Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc.
AFSCME Council 31
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
American Friends Service Committee - Chicago
The ARC of Illinois
Bethany for Children & Families
Center for Economic Progress
Center for Tax and Budget Accountability
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
Chicago Federation of Labor
Chicago Jobs Council
Chicago Teachers Union
Citizen Action/Illinois
Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities in Illinois
Connections for Abused Women and their Children
Health and Disability Advocates
Health and Medicine Policy Research Group
Heartland Alliance for Human Rights and Human Needs
Illinois Action for Children
Illinois AFL-CIO
Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans
Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities
Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights
Illinois Education Association
Illinois Federation of Teachers
Illinois Library Association
Illinois Maternal & Child Health Coalition
Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living
Jane Addams Senior Caucus
Lutheran Social Services of Illinois
National Association of Social Workers
Ounce of Prevention
Our Children's Homestead
Planned Parenthood of Illinois
Protestants for the Common Good
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
SEIU Healthcare Illinois and Indiana
SEIU Illinois State Council
Voices for IL Children
Women Employed
Alderman Joe Moore, 42nd Ward, Chicago