



JB Pritzker, Governor

Dulce M. Quintero, Secretary Designate

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DATE: December 23, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable John F. Curran, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Don Harmon, Senate President
The Honorable Tony McCombie, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Emanuel "Chris" Welch, Speaker of the House

FROM: Dulce Quintero *Dulce Quintero*
Secretary Designate *by Anushka*
Illinois Department of Human Services

SUBJECT: **Commission on Poverty Elimination and Economic Security FY2024 Annual Report**

The Illinois Department of Human Services respectfully submits the Commission on Poverty Elimination and Economic Security FY2024 Annual Report on behalf of the Office of Secretary in order to fulfill the requirements set forth in Public Act 101-0636.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Priya Khatkhate, Chief Policy Officer, at (312) 882-1884.

cc: The Honorable JB Pritzker, Governor
John W. Hollman, Clerk of the House
Tim Anderson, Secretary of the Illinois Senate
Legislative Research Unit
State Government Report Center



State of Illinois
Illinois Department of Human Services

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



ILLINOIS COMMISSION ON POVERTY
ELIMINATION AND ECONOMIC SECURITY



Introduction

The Illinois Commission on Poverty Elimination and Economic Security (Commission), completing its second year, continues to work toward the goal of ending “the intergenerational transmission of poverty by addressing root causes of economic security, racial disparities, and other contributing social, economic, and cultural factors,” as set out in the Intergenerational Poverty Act (IPA). ([305 ILCS 70/95](#)).

The Federal Poverty Level is the income threshold, determined by the federal government, below which a family and every individual in it is considered to be in poverty. As shown below, poverty is also based on the number of individuals living in the household. **Deep or extreme poverty** is defined as falling below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Almost 1.5 million people, or 11.9% of Illinois residents, are living in poverty, and 763,512 or 6.2% are living in deep poverty. More than 14% of residents are considered low-income, at 100-199% of FPL (see figure 1 below).

Number of IL Residents at or below Various Income Levels¹

Household Size	Extreme Poverty	Poverty	Low Income
<i>Threshold</i>	0-49% FPL	0-99% FPL	100 - 199% FPL
<i>Number of People</i>	763,512	1,469,643	1,757,880
One	\$6,795	\$13,590	\$27,180
Two	\$9,155	\$18,310	\$36,620
Three	\$11,515	\$23,030	\$46,060
Four	\$13,875	\$27,750	\$55,500

The Commission seeks to improve policy makers’ understanding of poverty and economic insecurity in Illinois, to support efforts to ensure residents have equal opportunity to achieve economic security, and to ultimately reduce and eliminate poverty in Illinois by making policy and other recommendations to State leaders.

In 2022, based on extensive research and feedback collected from stakeholders, the Commission adopted a comprehensive approach to addressing poverty to reach the statutory goals of (1) reducing deep poverty in the State by 50% by 2026; (2) eliminating child poverty in the State by 2031; and (3) eliminating all poverty in the State by 2036.

The Commission identified five action pillars, issued in the Commission’s 2022 five-year strategic plan, which are the guiding force for its work:

- **Pillar 1:** Ensure Illinois is Best in Nation for Raising Families
- **Pillar 2:** Stabilize Homes and Communities
- **Pillar 3:** Ensure Just and Equitable Access to Economic Security Programs
- **Pillar 4:** Address Barriers to Paid Work, Education, and Advancement
- **Pillar 5:** Support Trusted Community-Based Providers to Serve the Needs of those In Deep Poverty

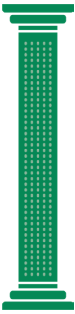
1. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=B17002&g=040XX00US17&y=2022>

Organized around each of these five pillars, the Commission’s subcommittees are designed to unify experts in the field and to create and advance annual goals that are incremental steps toward the overarching statutory goals.

This report outlines the goals established and the activities achieved for Fiscal Year 2024, in addition to documenting recommendations and commitments for Fiscal Year 2025.

The Commission’s work in FY2024 built upon the foundation, groundwork, and goals established in FY2023, which included extensive research into the root causes of deep poverty and childhood poverty in Illinois and the most promising means to address both the symptoms of the intergenerational cycles of poverty and its underlying causes. The 2023 Report can be found [here](#) or by visiting the [Commission webpage](#), and using the link under Commission Annual Reports.





Pillar 1: Ensuring Illinois is the Best in Nation for Raising Families

Expand Access to High Quality Early Childhood Services, Including Early Intervention, Home Visiting, and Affordable Childcare

Explore Ways to Replicate the Federal Child Tax Credit for Families Raising Children

Expand Access to Free and Reduced - Price School Meals

Increase Participation in WIC by Improving Accessibility for Those Who are Eligible

The Commission identified the following strategies to address some of the long-term implications of poverty that often begin in childhood. By addressing the needs of families, and especially young families, the intergenerational aspects of poverty may be disrupted and reversed.²

Strategy 1A – Expand Access to High Quality Early Childhood Services, Including Early Intervention, Home Visiting, and Affordable Childcare

The Commission in its 2023 Report recommended that the State increase capacity to serve more families with high-quality infant/toddler care by making the provision of this care economically viable for providers. Over FY24, the Illinois Department of Human Services’ (IDHS) Division of Early Childhood (DEC) implemented Smart Start Transition Grants while planning Smart Start Workforce Grants to support childcare programs in transitioning towards the Smart Start Workforce Grants, which were rolled out in November 2024. Illinois is investing approximately \$200M in funding in FY2025 for Early Childhood Workforce Grants to stabilize the childcare sector. By providing eligible childcare programs the full funding needed to compensate staff at a base wage and incorporating the specific needs of infant/toddler childcare within that funding, Smart Start Workforce Grants are addressing the workforce shortage that restricts access to high-quality infant/toddler care.

The State is investing an additional \$5M in FY25 to expand IDHS’s Home Visiting Program. A cost model has been developed to understand the best way to use these funds and will guide strategic investment to support the Home Visiting Programs and workforce. SFY25 Smart Start Home Visiting investments will support: (1) home visiting and doula expansion in new communities and among new grantees, (2) parallel investments in current grantees, and (3) infrastructure supports, like professional development, data, and quality improvement. This investment will support an estimated 250 additional families in home visiting and 120 families in doula services. This includes slot expansion in four Illinois communities; Douglas-Coles-Moultrie, DuPage, Lake, and Rock Island

Strategy 1B – Explore Ways to Replicate the Federal Child Tax Credit for Families Raising Children

Following through on a recommendation of the 2023 Report to explore ways to replicate the Child Tax Credit benefit, Commission members were part of a coalition that worked collaboratively with State legislators and the Governor’s Office to pass a bill in the 2024 legislative session implementing a Child Tax Credit in Illinois. As part of the FY25 State budget, Illinois enacted a child tax credit for working families with a child under the age of 12. The tax credit will be 20 percent of the taxpayer’s State earned income tax credit with an estimated value of \$50

2. Cheng, T. L., Johnson, S. B., & Goodman, E. (2016). Breaking the Intergenerational Cycle of Disadvantage: The Three Generation Approach. *Pediatrics*, 137(6), e20152467. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-2467>

million. The tax credit will double to 40 percent of the taxpayer's State earned income tax credit in 2025. Initial research studies estimate that the new State child tax credit is estimated to reduce child poverty in Illinois by 3.3%.³

Strategy 1C – Expand Access to Free and Reduced-Price School Meals

Commission members, in concert with the Illinois Commission to End Hunger, helped pass a bill in the 2024 legislative session that removes access barriers to school breakfast for low-income children, resulting in the award of \$300,000 in FY25 to help schools start or expand more flexible breakfast models, which decrease food insecurity, help improve academic performance, reduce behavioral problems, and improve children's diets.⁴

Strategy 1D – Increase Participation in WIC by Improving Accessibility for Those Who are Eligible

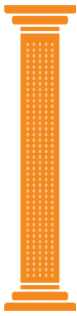
The Pillar 1 subcommittee had two goals relative to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in FY24.

The first goal was to design an advocacy strategy toward the continuation of funding for the WIC food package prescription, a federally funded program, at a level of \$25 per month per child, to purchase fruits and vegetables, securing increased purchasing power towards a healthy diet. The Commission partnered with the Illinois Commission to End Hunger to send a joint letter to legislators, calling for the full funding of WIC, which supports 151,949 mothers and young children in Illinois to reduce food insecurity and better connect to healthcare, leading to better outcomes for families.



As part of a second goal related to WIC, the subcommittee analyzed the findings of the year-long study conducted by the Commission to End Hunger (available [here](#)), identifying points of collaboration across the commissions to reduce barriers that prevent families from accessing WIC and other benefits.

3. Manzo IV, F., Bellisle, D., Bruno, R. Implementing a Child Tax Credit in Illinois: Economic, Social, and Fiscal Impacts (2024) <https://illinoisupdate.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/pmcr-ilepi-implementing-a-child-tax-credit-in-illinois-final.pdf>
4. Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), "Benefits of School Breakfast," <https://frac.org/programs/school-breakfast-program/benefits-school-breakfast>



Pillar 2: Stabilize Homes and Communities

Reduce Homelessness by Half and Ensure Housing Affordability and Accessibility

Invest in High-Quality, Specialized Supports for Persons Experiencing Mental Health and Substance Use-Related Crises

Invest in Interventions that Address Cycles of Trauma and Violence in our Communities

Strategy 2A – Reduce Homelessness by Half and Ensure Housing Affordability and Accessibility

On any given night in Illinois, an estimated 12,000 people are unhoused, living in shelters and transitional housing programs, in parks, cars, and abandoned buildings. In addition to Illinois residents who are experiencing literal homelessness, tens of thousands of Illinois families live temporarily and unstably with family and friends. This number was estimated to be 10,431 at the same time last year.⁵

In addition to the individuals and families experiencing homelessness who have resided in the State for longer periods, beginning in August 2022, thousands of Asylum Seekers arrived from the country’s southern border. The State’s efforts to reach functional zero homelessness are impacted by the realities of homelessness and housing insecurity that many of these recent migrants face.⁶

The Commission supports the work and leadership of the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, the Illinois Interagency Task Force to End Homelessness, and the Illinois Community Advisory Council on Homelessness to ensure safe, stable housing for every Illinois resident. Housing is a key social determinant of health, and stable housing can have a significant impact on physical and mental health, as well as access to steady, well-paying employment and community resources and supports.⁷

[Illinois’ recent first-of-its kind study on Black homelessness](#) found that in Illinois, Black people are eight times more likely to become homeless at some point in their lives than white residents. While this racial disparity in homelessness is not unique to Illinois, the State’s gap is one of the most acute in the country. Illinois’ racial disparity in homelessness is double the national rate, and Black Illinois residents are four times more likely to be homeless than white residents.

Following historic investment in emergency rental assistance during COVID-19, the State once again invested in housing stability by putting \$75M in FY25 into a Court-Based Rental Assistance Program (CBRAP), which helps low-income renters navigate and prevent eviction and the devastating consequences that can follow.

5. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2023) HUD 2023 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_State_IL_2023.pdf

6. City of Chicago 2023 Point-in-Time Count & Survey Report of People Experiencing Homelessness (2023) https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/fss/supp_info/Homeless/2023PITCOUNT/2023%20PIT%20Report_FINAL.pdf

7. Arenas, I., Scarborough, W, Lehmann, A., Brown K., and Lewis A.E., Black Homelessness in Illinois: Structural Drivers of Inequality Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRPPP) University of Illinois at Chicago (2024) https://news.wttw.com/sites/default/files/article/file-attachments/BlackHomelessnessInIllinois_FULL%20REPORT_0.pdf

In FY24, the Pillar 2 subcommittee met and exceeded its goal of funding or supporting the development of at least 300 supportive housing units. The Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) approved 14 new developments under its Permanent Supportive Housing Development Program, which included 393 units.⁸

Additionally, the group researched and is continuing to understand the impact of rent control and subsidy models for affordable housing for future advocacy efforts.⁹ Research based on a study in St. Paul, Minnesota indicates those with lower incomes and minorities face the greatest decreases to property values as a result of rent control. Further, there was no transfer of wealth from high-income to low-income households.¹⁰

While some low-income families benefit from rent control, higher-income households often receive a disproportionate share of the benefits. Therefore, as an intervention to reduce poverty, rent control and rent stabilization policies do not provide targeted benefits.

However, research also indicates that tenants in rent-regulated apartments stay in those apartments longer, thus reducing evictions. Although some research suggests that rent regulations lead to higher rents in unregulated units, other research finds it lowers rents overall. Moderate rent control does not seem to influence new construction (since the moderation would not apply rent controls to the initial price of new units), but research indicates stricter rent regulation increases the conversion of rental units into owner-occupied properties (e.g., condo conversions).



8. The Illinois Affordable Housing Task Force Illinois' Annual Comprehensive Housing Plan Calendar Year 2024 (2024) https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-Dtg9BmNE4QfSl6By_EGtpwITN9arJJa/view
9. CONSUMER FIN. PROT. BUREAU, DISPUTES ON CONSUMER CREDIT REPORTS 8–9 (2021) [hereinafter, CFPB DISPUTES ON CONSUMER CREDIT REPORTS], https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/cfpb_disputes-on-consumer-credit-reports_report_2021-11.pdf; CONSUMER FIN. PROT. BUREAU
10. DATA POINT: CREDIT INVISIBLES 16–18 (2015), [hereinafter, CFPB DATA POINT: CREDIT INVISIBLES], https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/201505_cfpb_data-point-credit-invisibles.pdf.

Mandatory credit checks can be another barrier to accessing rental housing. Black and Brown persons are more likely to have inaccurate credit reports or have had experiences that resulted in low or no credit scores. Residents of majority-Black areas are more than twice as likely to dispute items in their credit report as errors than residents of majority-white areas. The group will prioritize research and developing an advocacy strategy around the recommendations that come from this research.

In FY25, Pillar 2 will continue this work, as well as its ongoing efforts with IHDA to create a map of housing affordability and availability, with special attention toward availability for individuals with a disability, mental illness, or substance use disorder.

Strategy 2B – Invest in High-Quality, Specialized Supports for Persons Experiencing Mental Health and Substance Use-Related Crises

Untreated or unsupported severe mental illness and substance use disorders lead to a disproportionate likelihood of experiencing poverty. Holistic care is needed to support individuals in crisis in maintaining housing, which includes crisis intervention efforts that divert people from jail or emergency room care when they are facing challenges related to chronic or episodic mental illness or substance use disorder.

Persons with severe mental illness (SMI) and substance use disorder (SUD) are disproportionately likely to experience poverty. The impact is bi-directional: poverty itself can increase the likelihood of the onset of mental illness, while experiencing mental illness may also increase the chances of experiencing poverty. In addition to investing in the tools needed to respond to housing for people in crisis, a crisis intervention model that diverts as many people as possible from jail or emergency room care is crucial to helping people facing chronic or episodic challenges related to mental health or substance use disorder avoid being propelled into deep poverty.

Building a strong and responsive continuum of care for those experiencing crisis has been a focus of IDHS's Division of Mental Health (IDHS-DMH). This has included a comprehensive crisis continuum that incorporates tools for identifying those in crisis, mobile crisis response, crisis stabilization services, residential crisis services, psychiatric consultation, and warm referrals to home- and community-based services. In 2022, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services made available \$35 million to support mobile crisis response



teams across the State to support 988, a national three-digit dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which launched in July 2022.

More can be done to support the providers who are critical to the crisis care continuum. Illinois relies on a network of more than 200 Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) to provide the safety net of publicly funded mental health care. Because they are embedded in their communities, CMHCs have unique knowledge and expertise to provide services and supports to individuals with or at risk of SMI or severe emotional disturbance (SED) (for those under 18). Because CMHCs' operations must rely so heavily on providing Medicaid-billable services to Medicaid-eligible individuals, agencies cannot often afford to allow staff to spend time seeking out individuals who are not already engaged in treatment or enrolled in Medicaid, but are nonetheless in need of support.

For those experiencing substance use disorder, similar coordinated tactics can be used to reach those in crisis. 988 and the mobile crisis response teams are the primary response for a behavioral health crisis. IDHS's Division of Substance Use Prevention and Recovery (IDHS-SUPR) supports the Illinois Helpline, a resource for mobile crisis teams and others when a substance use crisis warrants immediate follow-up to engage in treatment, including medications that can reduce overdoses by 50 percent.

IDHS-SUPR funds more than 110 substance use disorder treatment organizations at over 250 sites to provide services for people who are uninsured, has supported the use of funds for Community Intervention services that allow funded organizations to provide engagement services outside of their "brick and mortar" facilities to intervene directly with those who are homeless, and has implemented mobile medication units for people experiencing opioid use disorder to reach them "where they are at" in their recovery journey.

SUPR has also supported the expansion of recovery homes, including 100 Oxford Houses, which provide short- and long-term supportive, sober living environments for individuals with an SUD recovering from a housing crisis.

Strategy 2C – Invest in Interventions that Address Cycles of Trauma and Violence in our Communities

Illinois continues to make investments to address community trauma, historic racism, and violence through targeted, integrated behavioral health services, and economic opportunities. The Office of Firearm Violence Prevention (OFVP) at IDHS has a \$135M FY25 budget, which includes \$60M in State funds for the fourth year of the multi-year Reimagine Public Safety grant program, which builds on initial federal investments, targeting youth development, violence prevention, and victim services (including street outreach and intervention). Additionally, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) will receive \$200M in funding for the Restore, Reinvest, Renew (R3) program for violence prevention and victim services.

Illinois Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton convened the Healing Illinois Task Force, drawing a large cross-section of State leaders to propel a trauma-informed and healing-centered approach to the State's work across disciplines. The Task Force is working to identify and expand on existing State resources that support trauma-informed and healing-centered work– in partnership with community organizations. By using a data-driven approach, the overarching organizational structure aims to ensure coordination, alignment, and progress across the State.

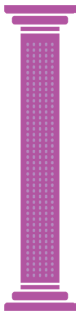
With continued commitment to stabilize homes and communities, Pillar Two subcommittee members outlined a set of actions they intend to pursue during FY25. Areas of focus for Pillar Two include:

- **Increased Appropriations:** subcommittee members are committed to creating and implementing an advocacy strategy to increase appropriations for permanent supportive housing services and housing subsidies for high-risk populations, as outlined in the “Home Illinois: Illinois’ Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.”¹¹
- **Increased Collaboration:** subcommittee members are interested and eager to put together a collaborative workplan to work jointly with the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) to work on and enhance a Homeless Management Information System.
- **Research Land Use:** one of the obstacles to increasing affordable housing has been limited access to available land. The Pillar Two subcommittee will dedicate effort to research federal land use policies to determine the existence of, and potential use of, lands upon which to build affordable housing units.
- **Research Specialized Employment Programs:** exploring the existence and effectiveness of specialized employment programs focused on reaching individuals experiencing mental health and substance use related crises could help to inform a set of best practices to guide work taking place in Illinois.

These areas of focus for Pillar Two demonstrate the ongoing commitment to stabilizing homes and communities across the state.



11. DATA POINT: CREDIT INVISIBLES 16–18 (2015), [hereinafter, CFPB DATA POINT: CREDIT INVISIBLES], https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/201505_cfpb_data-point-credit-invisibles.pdf.



Pillar 3: Ensure Just and Equitable Access to Economic Security Programs

Create a Single, Accessible Platform for Individuals to Enroll in All State Benefits

Increase Uptake, Access, and Value of Public Benefits for Those in Extreme Poverty

Deploy Direct Cash Assistance Programs to Lift Families Out of Poverty

Strategy 3A – Create a Single, Accessible Platform for Individuals to Enroll in All State Benefits

The persistent complexity of public benefits systems can be an obstacle for those in poverty to accessing needed services and supports. The State’s integrated benefits system, the Application for Benefits Eligibility (ABE), helps to bridge some of the barriers to access by allowing for applications and management of benefits online, anytime. The system continues to improve, but much work remains to realize the goal of a universal, easily accessible single platform.

The Pillar 3 subcommittee continues to search for the best means to develop an interagency map that links eligibility criteria across benefit options to help inform future work to enhance access and reduce barriers to receiving State benefits.

Strategy 3B – Increase Uptake, Access, and Value of Public Benefits for Those in Extreme Poverty

The State administers several federal antipoverty programs, including Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Unemployment Insurance, among others.

Together, these programs provide critical support for 3.9 million individual and families in Illinois, but many remain disconnected and in need.¹²

In the summer of 2024, IDHS and ISBE implemented Summer EBT, the first new federal nutrition program in 50 years. Child hunger increases in the summer when families lack access to school meals.¹³ Summer EBT now provides a grocery benefit to families with school-aged children when school is out for the summer. Summer EBT has enormous potential for reducing child hunger and is available to families regardless of their immigration status. The Commission has been working to support these efforts and to get out the word to community members and partners to ensure that eligible families can benefit from this much-needed program

The Commission has also helped facilitate collaboration between State agencies and non-profit research entities to chart a path toward simplifying the filing process for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), with the aim of helping more eligible families receive this valuable benefit. Along with State agencies and community

12. Illinois Department of Human Service- June 2021. Just The Facts (2021) <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=137246#:~:text=SNAP%20Assistance%20was%20given%20to,households%20from%20June%202020%20levels>.
 13. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (2024, May 21) Biden-Harris Administration Makes History Launching New Suite of Summer Nutrition Programs to Help Tackle Hunger and Improve Healthy Eating for Millions of Children [Press release]. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/news-item/usda-0093.24>

leadership from Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) leaders, policy and research think tank New America aims to develop and test potential workflows and language around a simplified EITC filing and benefits distribution system.

Strategy 3C – Deploy Direct Cash Assistance Programs to Lift Families Out of Poverty

As part of an ongoing multiyear effort, the State’s Office to Prevent and End Homelessness and the Commission continued their partnership with the University of Chicago Inclusive Economy Lab (IEL) on the Stability Housing Investment for Families (SIFH) Guaranteed Income Pilot. The initiative focuses on helping families experiencing homelessness to exit shelters and stabilize through the provision of a one-time cash transfer. Related data collection and research activities continue and will help Illinois make well informed policy decisions on reducing homelessness and supporting families escape deep poverty.¹⁴

Subcommittee members played a role in the creation and promotion of a [fact sheet for the Child Tax Credit](#) and also assisted in documenting a district-by-district impact analysis [and a legislative toolkit](#) for community members and advocates to talk to their legislators about the Child Tax Credit.

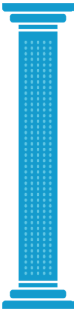
Subcommittee members also had a role in shaping bills introduced during the 2024 legislative session that would have provided guaranteed income payments for youth aging out of foster care, providing them with cash assistance for up to a three-year period to ensure they do not experience homelessness after leaving care.

To build on FY24’s achievements, Pillar Three has set impactful goals for FY25, aimed at creating a more inclusive and accessible benefits system for Illinois residents in need. These commitments include:

- **Developing an Integrated Enrollment Platform:** To further streamline benefits access, Pillar Three unified its original goals #1 and #2. This combined effort will create an interagency map that connects eligibility criteria across various benefit programs and links these with the Application for Benefits Eligibility (ABE) platform. The resulting simplified application process would allow users to apply for multiple benefits simultaneously, reduce barriers to accessing benefits, and increase EITC uptake among those in deep poverty. The subcommittee will also map current efforts, such as SNAP/Medicaid and WIC data integration, and implement targeted outreach by notifying families of potential EITC/Child Tax Credit eligibility.
- **Enhancing Benefit Uptake and Retention:** To improve access to WIC, SNAP, and Summer EBT for those in extreme poverty, the subcommittee will promote these programs through a coordinated marketing campaign. By leveraging social media and newsletters, Poverty Commission members will increase awareness and drive greater retention in these essential programs.
- **Supporting Direct Cash Assistance Initiatives:** In line with the goal of alleviating deep poverty, Pillar Three will host a convening for organizations and State legislators. This event will facilitate knowledge sharing on guaranteed income pilot programs and build awareness of direct cash assistance as a valuable tool for family support.

These FY25 goals underscore Pillar Three’s dedication to improving benefits accessibility, promoting economic stability, and fostering innovative solutions to reduce poverty across Illinois.

14. <https://urbanlabs.uchicago.edu/projects/guaranteed-income> Brady, F., Croes, M., Robinson, S., Schexnider, M., Stapleton, S., Wallace, N., University of Chicago Urban Labs (2023) Chicago Resilient Communities Pilot <https://urbanlabs.uchicago.edu/attachments/5c577639c291dbf0e037e3ebc5627cd73985b2d9/store/ecddd230d6b35dba45fd6c61ff1d0edb15e4491326aa9afefe6894cc955/CRCP+First+Look+Report+Winter+2023.pdf>



Pillar 4: Address Barriers to Paid Work, Education, and Advancement

Address Barriers that Prevent Consistent Work at a Living Wage by Investing in Transportation, Childcare, Paid Leave, Broadband, Legal Aid, Reentry Services, Disability and Rehabilitation Supports, and Immigrant and Refugee Services

Invest in Apprenticeship, Work-Based Learning, and Barrier-Reduction Programs so Individuals Can Learn and Train While Supporting their Family

Expand Access to Legal Counsel for Illinoisans and Ensure Equitable Access to Court and Legal Processes

Strategy 4A – Address Barriers that Prevent Consistent Work at a Living Wage by Investing in Transportation, Childcare, Paid Leave, Broadband, Legal Aid, Reentry Services, Disability and Rehabilitation Supports, and Immigrant and Refugee Services

There are many challenges and barriers that make it especially difficult for those living in poverty to maintain stable, well-paid employment or to complete the education that would help them hold such jobs. These include systemic obstacles, such as racial bias, gender discrimination, age, disability, justice system involvement, and immigration status.

In 2024, IDHS’s Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) set a focus toward increasing equity in employment and housing, broadening the reach of the IDHS-DRS, and expanding awareness and inclusivity. These efforts helped open doors to more Illinoisans with disabilities who have the desire to work and increased outreach to youth with disabilities across the state.

DRS also was awarded a \$10M Pathways to Partnership Disability Innovation Fund Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, which aims to improve transition outcomes, competitive integrated employment (CIE), and independent living outcomes for students with disabilities ages 10-24. Finally, DRS improved the landscape to incentivize employment for Illinoisans with disabilities by strengthening partnerships with Community Rehabilitation Providers.

This resulted in 39,398 customers served and nearly 4,000 individuals with disabilities gaining competitive employment, and 1,327 customers who were earning SSI/SSDI taking competitive jobs (FY23).

Another significant barrier to employment across many communities is access to quality and affordable childcare, which is even more true for families living in poverty. During FY24, the Pillar 4 subcommittee worked with partners from the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) and IDHS’s Division of Early Childhood (IDHS-DEC) on a statewide map of childcare availability and regional demand, to identify service gaps to inform future advocacy efforts.

The culmination of these efforts will include a strategy to address the highest need areas to ensure an increase in high-quality childcare providers, especially those who offer flexible hours of service, to meet the needs of the modern workforce. Members hope this map will be completed and available for advocates’ use in the coming months. The State’s newly established Department of Early Childhood will also be a key partner in this work.

Strategy 4B – Invest in Apprenticeship, Work-Based Learning, and Barrier-Reduction Programs so Individuals Can Learn and Train While Supporting their Family

Education and training programs that can help individuals attain well-paid jobs and invest in future earning potential while still working or earning are particularly vital to the advancement of those living in poverty who are not able to pause paid work to further their skill sets. Barrier reduction programs are a valuable means for Illinoisans to advance while still supporting themselves and providing for their families.

The Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) created the Supportive Services and Barrier Reduction Services, a resource for people participating in job training or work-based learning programs. Participants receive the support needed to ensure that they have access to resources they need to continue attending and to complete the program. This support extends beyond the training to assist as they seek jobs and acclimate to employment.

Participants are typically low income, with children, in debt, do not have their own vehicle, and may have numerous other barriers that make it more difficult for them to engage in long period trainings, especially in work-based learning program where they are not compensated.

Through Barrier Reduction funding, 2,095 services have been provided at a total cost of \$602,585. A majority of the services provided were related to (1) the “Other Services” category which include stipends, broadband, cellphone acquisition, and various fees; (2) transportation including car repairs, fees, and rideshare; and (3) housing, including rent, arrears, and utilities. DCEO will continue to identify places that have flexibility to use Barrier Reduction funds.



Strategy 4C – Expand Access to Legal Counsel for Illinoisans and Ensure Equitable Access to Court and Legal Processes

The Commission and Subcommittee are looking forward to focusing energies in this area in FY25.

Looking ahead to FY2025, Pillar Four is committed to intensifying efforts to remove barriers that prevent Illinois residents from maintaining stable, living-wage employment—particularly through addressing the critical need for affordable childcare options. The planned actions include:

- **Researching Models for Universal Childcare and Pre-K:** The subcommittee will conduct an in-depth analysis of existing universal childcare and Pre-K programs, examining their funding models, outcomes, and best practices. This research will provide a foundation for developing robust recommendations tailored to Illinois’ needs. The subcommittee will seek to support and work alongside the new Illinois Department of Early Childhood on this and related work.
- **Building Partnerships for Policy Support:** To strengthen advocacy efforts, the subcommittee will establish partnerships with key stakeholders, including community organizations, policymakers, and employers, gathering diverse perspectives to bolster support for potential policy reforms.
- **Developing an Informed Advocacy Strategy:** By integrating findings from their childcare research and the ongoing mapping of childcare availability and affordability, the subcommittee will craft an advocacy strategy focused on enhancing Illinois’ childcare offerings and making quality care accessible to more families.

To further support workforce development, Pillar Four will prioritize **Investment in Apprenticeships and Barrier Reduction Programs**. This will include advancing advocacy for appropriations dedicated to expanding work-based learning and apprenticeship programs, as well as identifying opportunities for improvement in existing barrier reduction initiatives that help residents enter and thrive in the workforce.

Through these FY2025 commitments, Pillar Four aims to create a more supportive environment that empowers Illinoisans to achieve stable employment and economic independence.





Pillar 5: Support Trusted Community Based Providers to Serve the Needs of those In Deep Poverty

Support our caregiving workforce by ensuring equitable wages and develop meaningful supports for unpaid caregivers

Provide community-based providers with consistent and equitable access to State funding that adequately keeps pace with rising costs

Strategy 5A: Support our caregiving workforce by ensuring equitable wages and develop meaningful supports for unpaid caregivers

The Pillar 5 Subcommittee sought in FY24 to create an integrated network of trusted community-based providers who serve those experiencing deep poverty to ensure ongoing stakeholder engagement, practice-sharing, and regular dissemination of opportunities. Subcommittee members compiled a list of IDHS grantees as a baseline list of “trusted community-based providers.” Subcommittee members have begun to cross-reference this list with other resources to assess if gaps need to be filled for completeness. Discussions continue within the subcommittee to determine the most efficient and effective next steps in this project.

Strategy 5B: Provide community-based providers with consistent and equitable access to State funding that adequately keeps pace with rising costs

The Subcommittee Chair, who leads human service workers’ advocacy group Illinois Partners, helped design the Human Services Equitable Pay Act, introduced during the FY24 legislative session. This proposed legislation would have required the State to analyze pay gaps that community-based providers are experiencing. While this legislation did not advance, the subcommittee continues to look at ways to support its aims.

As we look to FY2025, Pillar Five is continuing its commitment to strengthen support systems for Illinois’s caregiving workforce and to ensure equitable, impactful funding reaches those most in need. The goals for the upcoming year include:

- **Advocating for Caregiver Support:** The subcommittee will pursue advocacy for appropriations to bolster financial support for caregivers, focusing on securing cost-of-living adjustments for caregiving providers to sustain this vital workforce. Additionally, the subcommittee is in support of the caregiver portal being developed by the Illinois Department on Aging.
- **Building an Integrated Network of Community Providers:** To improve services for those experiencing deep poverty, the subcommittee will research best practices for engaging and coordinating with community-based providers. This effort will clarify the concept of an “integrated network,” ensuring that community organizations can effectively collaborate, share resources, and disseminate opportunities for better support.
- **Advancing Equitable Access to State Funding:** Pillar Five is committed to promoting consistent and equitable funding that reflects the rising costs of essential services. In FY25, they will revisit the Human Services Equitable Pay Act, analyzing previous feedback to refine and strengthen the proposal to align with broader Commission priorities.

- **Improving Disbursement Practices for Anti-Poverty Funds:** To increase the effectiveness of State funds reaching families in need, the subcommittee will document best practices in fund distribution. Drawing from this research, they will design an advocacy strategy to enhance Illinois' disbursement practices, maximizing the impact of funds for families facing poverty.

These FY2025 commitments underscore Pillar Five's dedication to creating a supportive, well-funded framework for caregiving and service providers, ensuring that Illinois' most vulnerable families receive consistent and substantial assistance.

Conclusion

The Commission is committed to continuing the work of reducing intergenerational poverty by addressing the systems that perpetuate this cycle, particularly among non-white Illinois residents and within communities that have long been under-resourced. The Commission recognizes the many pressures faced in crafting a new State FY26 budget but is committed to a creative and flexible approach to effectively confronting the challenges faced by Illinoisans living in deep poverty.

The summary of the Commission's and its Subcommittees' work represents a fraction of the work being done around the State by government agencies and private sector partners. In order to meet the Commission's fast-approaching goals of poverty reduction and elimination, these efforts will have to be continually updated, expanded, and improved. This comes at a difficult juncture, with projected State budget challenges and the still-unknown impacts on federal funding as a new presidential administration prepares to take office. It will be more important than ever for everyone committed to the goals of poverty elimination to be creative and diligent in this shared work.



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and Economic Security