

**Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty
Full Commission Meeting Minutes
September 18, 2017**

2:00 – 3:27 p.m.

Call-in number: 800-796-7721; Access Code: 28868#

1) Welcome & Introductions (2:00 – 2:06 p.m.)

In attendance:

Janice Glenn (Department of Human Rights – Commission Co-Chair)
Evelyn Diaz (Heartland Alliance – Commission Co-chair)
Kimberly Drew (Heartland Alliance)
Josh Altman (Office of Governor Bruce Rauner)
Katie Buitrago (Social IMPACT Research Center – Heartland Alliance)
Juana Ballesteros (IDPH)
Marcus Hardy (DOC)
Eric Zarnikow & Katharine Gricevich (ISAC)
Khari Hunt (DHS)
Alex Bautista (Department of Human Rights)
Michael Dropka (DCEO)
Jim Hires (Eastern Illinois Food Bank)
Wendy Pollack (Sargent Shriver Center on Poverty Law)
April Janney (Illinois Action for Children)
Jean Bohnhoff (Department on Aging)

2) Review and Approval of Minutes from 6/12/2017 and 2/27/17 Commission Meeting (2:06 – 2:07 p.m.)

Evelyn Diaz – Heartland Alliance & Commission Co-Chair

- Minutes are approved as distributed by the Commission
- NB: minutes from the preceding two Commission meetings were approved in this meeting because the Commission failed to approve minutes at the previous meeting

3) Updates on Poverty Data and SNAP Time Limit Waiver (2:07 – 2:45 p.m.)

A) Update on Poverty Data

Katie Buitrago – Social IMPACT Research Center (Heartland Alliance)

- Census American Community Survey Release
 - Nationwide poverty rate has returned to pre-recession levels for the first time since 2007, but Illinois' poverty rate is still higher than its pre-recession level but the number is still decreasing
 - The median household income is increasing nationwide, but the median household income has remained stagnant in Illinois

- This may suggest job quality issues impeding economic growth in Illinois.
- Health insurance coverage is at a record high, with 95% of non-seniors having health insurance. This improvement can in part be attributed to the Affordable Care Act.
- In 2017, the Illinois poverty rate is 13%, an improvement from 13.6%, but the percentage of Illinoisans living in extreme poverty is 5.9%, or approximately 750,000 people. The current poverty rate is 4% lower than the pre-recession rate.
- On average, there were no improvements in household incomes in black and white (non-Hispanic) communities, but Latino communities saw an increase in median household income. Still, people of color are disproportionately affected by poverty.
- Questions regarding update
 - *Q: How does SNAP influence the poverty rate?*
 - A: SNAP helps many people move over the poverty line, but if SNAP benefits were to be rolled back, many of these individuals would return to poverty
 - *Q: How do these measurements of the poverty rate differ from the rates reported in the Commission's annual report?*
 - A: Given that the census is conducted every ten years (the latest being in 2010), and that it is based on an outdated measure related to food costs it does not take into account non-cash public benefits like SNAP. The Supplemental Poverty Measure however which we include into our Annual Report does take into account SNAP and other public benefits more generally. In many ways, this data can be more reflective of what individual needs are. A drawback however is that even if someone is a SNAP recipient whose income is above the poverty line (s)he may still be within 200% of poverty and experiencing hardship.
 - *Q: Given that more men than women and more people of color are below the poverty line according to this data, how are we to understand the social impact of SNAP? How do we make the case for SNAP benefits when we have so many impacted communities still impoverished in the presence of SNAP?*
 - A: The data in the [Data Matters](#) is specific to SNAP beneficiaries, so naturally the picture it paints is different than data that speaks to the general population from census data. There is overlap too.
 - *Q: Can this data be broken down to Chicago compared to the rest of the state? This might be useful in locating principal issues. Also, might there be an inclusion of the Living Wage and Self-Sufficiency Standard as opposed to simply the poverty rate?*
 - A: Yes, it can be broken out into the Chicago-metropolitan area (although not to the city itself). And yes, self-sufficiency standards might be more telling than the poverty rate.
 - *Q: Does this data capture incarcerated adults in terms of poverty?*

- A: Annual data does not reflect citizens in institutions, but the decennial census does count them. There are currently 43,000 Illinoisans incarcerated.

B) Update on Request for ABAWD SNAP Benefits Time Limit Waiver

Kim Drew – Heartland Alliance

- Background: A requirement of SNAP recipients who are able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), is that they be employed. However, states can seek a waiver from the federal government during times of economic hardship to waive this SNAP requirement. Typically, Americans are required to work a minimum of 20 hours per week to be eligible for SNAP, but a waiver would eliminate this requirement. The thought behind this waiver is that if there is economic downturn, there is a heightened risk of job insecurity. At present, Illinois receives a SNAP/ABAWD waiver because the state's economic recovery has been slower than other states.
- Governor Rauner can request a waiver for 2018 for every county except DuPage County. This waiver would allow ABAWDs to continue receiving SNAP for as long as they are experiencing hunger. The Governor has until the end of the year to request the waiver.
- It is predicted that if the Governor does not request a waiver, 260,000 Illinois residents would lose access to SNAP. It is also a costly and complex policy to implement correctly – DHS will have to track work hours in a different way and do a better job of screening ABAWDs for exceptions like disability or physical and mental health issues that may be barriers to employment.

Katie Buitrago – Social IMPACT Research Center (Heartland Alliance)

- SNAP data relevant to the waiver
 - Among SNAP beneficiaries, 1 in 5 are working but do not work enough hours to qualify for SNAP; 2 in 5 are extremely rent burdened; 1 in 4 has no high school degree
 - Among the ABAWDs, 18% have disabilities that do not meet the standard for work disabling; 1 in 5 lack health insurance (higher than Illinois' 5% uninsured average)
 - Half of the SNAP beneficiaries are between ages 20-40; only 1 in 3 ABAWDs are white (hence most are people of color)
 - The data does not reveal how a criminal record influences employment, but it is clear that an ABAWD with a record would face barriers to employment that would ultimately delay reintegration in society.
- Case study in Ohio, a state that lost the SNAP waiver. They found that 1 in 3 ABAWDs had a felony on record, and the number may be similar in Illinois

Kim Drew – Heartland Alliance

- DuPage County does not qualify for the waiver because the federal government uses a proxy for unemployment to determine eligibility. In DuPage County, the

unemployment rate is higher than in the rest of the state, so it is not eligible for a SNAP time limit waiver.

- Question
 - Q: *Why hasn't the Governor re-requested the waiver?*
 - A: It is not clear at present. There might be ideological pushback, but it is also important to remember that the Governor previously requested this waiver last year. While DHS must act quickly to draft a request, the Governor has until January 1 to act. In fact, some states have even requested a waiver in the new year upon realizing that not having the waiver would be costly.
- Also, it is important to keep in mind that federal funds for SNAP might be cut independent of the Governor's ultimate decision. If there is no infrastructure to provide SNAP benefits to unemployed ABAWDs, this element of the safety net would disappear.

4) Update on Listening Tour (2:45 – 2:59 p.m.)

Janice Glenn – Department of Human Rights

- The Eastern Illinois Food Bank provided the Commission an opportunity to tour the Wesley Food Pantry and garden at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. There was an opportunity for commissioners to hear from stakeholders (students and administrators) associated with the University of Illinois and Parkland College
- An important element of the listening session was discussion of the *stigma* surrounding food pantries. Undergraduates, graduate students, and even faculty members might feel embarrassed to use the resource or might feel that there are those “more in need” than themselves. The food pantry representatives seek to break down this stigma, which prevents many residents from accessing food. Peer-to-peer communication about the food pantry's existence and availability to students helps breakdown the stigma. Representatives from Parkland discussed how community “buy-in” is effective, e.g., professors or coaches bringing students to the food pantry to either volunteer or show its location.
- Unlike most food pantries, this food pantry is open during the evenings. This is beneficial for clients who might work during the day. The pantry also serves as a resource for books, job brochures, and additional social services.
- The pantry staff speaks Spanish and French (for immigrant populations from the Congo). The staff discussed how the most requested item by clients is diapers, which are not covered by SNAP.
- Also, the staff emphasized the importance of choice in its operation. This food pantry is styled to allow clients to shop for the food they need, as opposed to providing all clients with the same prepackaged materials. This is more efficient because clients know their needs better than the staff, and it also saves resources. The staff discussed how food donations can add inefficiency to the food distribution because clients may take longer to shop when deciding between a wide array of options and it increases the labor burden on the staff's part. Buying in bulk limits options, which decreases the array of choices available to clients, but ultimately it increases the efficiency of distribution. Direct monetary contributions are more effective than in-kind donations.

- The Greater Chicago Food Bank services local food pantries, and the pantries essentially serve as retail stores.
- The growing costs of college have made it more difficult for students to afford tuition. Working a summer job no longer allows students to overcome debt, and financial aid is often not large enough. International students receive grants, but the grants are not necessarily enough to cover living costs such as food. International students are generally not eligible to work in the United States so earning disposable income for these students is a challenge.

5) Annual Report (2:59 – 3:12 p.m.)

Kim Drew – Heartland Alliance

- The Commission is required to release its annual report each September. Given the recent release of the census data and the recent completion of the listening tour, the Commission is still finalizing the report. All commissioners are requested to send edits to Kim Drew by Friday September 29th. The report will then be edited by a representative from the Governor's Office and then will ultimately be approved by Janice or Evelyn.
- The Annual Report includes 31 bills that are being monitored by the Commission. A brief overview of the state budget is included.
- Questions
 - Q: Does the Commission lobby for the bills included in the report? Members of the Commission may disagree with bills that take appropriations from other important issues, e.g., education funds being devoted to poverty.
 - A: The Commission is forbidden from lobbying for bills; rather, bills included in the report are identified as bills the Commission will monitor because the bills will influence poverty and anti-poverty policy, which is within the Commission's purview. The report seeks to use neutral language toward bills being monitored. The list of bills is developed and approved when we create our Legislative Watch List at our first meeting of the year.

6) State Agency Feedback Pertinent to Future Commission Matters (3:12 – 3:27 p.m.)

Evelyn Diaz – Heartland Alliance

- The Commission would like to briefly solicit agency feedback regarding how different lines of work may tie in to poverty and the Commission's future work. Are there challenges or opportunities you see in the short term that may be relevant to the Poverty Commission.

Department of Human Services

- Housing is clearly tied to poverty, not only in terms of ABAWDs securing housing and work but also in terms of disability. Many disabled residents have the compounded struggle of having to find secure housing. Supportive housing is a big emerging issue.
- It is worth discussing how children's services also tie into poverty

Illinois Student Assistance Commission

- While beyond the purview of ISAC, the Commission might consider a listening session to better understand how people with criminal backgrounds are limited in terms of access to benefits and employment. How can the state ease this transition back into society?

Department of Corrections

- The DOC sees a 50% recidivism rate. Part of this problem can be attributed to DOC itself, but a large component of it is how society perceives incarceration. Even though there is a great number of Illinoisans with a criminal record, society does not always embrace the “return home.” Housing restrictions and benefits restrictions for people with felonies on their backgrounds can start a vicious cycle of recidivism.
- There are ways to integrate corrections with efforts to end hunger. For example, there is a correctional facility that grows crops, which allows for prisoners to learn about agriculture and do something meaningful while incarcerated. The garden provides harvestable crops for prisoners to consume, and often the garden runs at a surplus. Surplus crops can be donated to the community and food pantries.
- Another issue is mental health for women prisoners who often face sexual assault. It would be worth considering how these psychological effects can influence economic stability.

Department of Public Health

- There are many social determinants of health, including behavioral health, mental health, children’s health. It is important to consider the causal relationship between health. Is there a bidirectional relationship between poverty and health? Is there a positive feedback loop of sorts? The [State Health Improvement Plan](#) (SHIP) may be a good opportunity to tie in social determinants of health/poverty.

Department of Aging

- More Illinoisans are moving into the Department’s service network. There is an anticipated 67% increase in the eligible population by 2030. This population explosion is leading to questions regarding the offering of benefits, e.g., SNAP, Medicare, etc. How can you ensure stability for people experiencing poverty that are also elderly?

7) Future Agenda (3:27 – 3:27 p.m.)

- The Commission will meet again in 2018 with the quarterly meeting dates TBD
- Final reminder to send Kim Drew feedback on the Commission’s annual report by Friday, September 29th.

8) Adjournment (3:27 p.m.)