

2022 Legislative Update

In 2022, Legal Action Chicago provided critical expertise and advocacy to advance legislation that would help people experiencing poverty and injustice—and stop legislation that would harm low-income families, women, and people of color. Legal Action Chicago took a position on a wide variety of legislation, spearheaded negotiations and facilitated key conversations on many of these bills.

Here are some highlights of our work during the 2022 legislative session:

Consumer Protections

Legal Action Chicago has unique value to bring in the consumer protections arena, leveraging its understanding of how consumer legislation can drive the cycle of poverty and deepen the racial wealth divide. In 2022, we successfully worked to stop SB3035, which would have allowed mortgage lenders to routinely re-file foreclosure cases against homeowners, effectively creating an exception to the statute of limitations. This law would have been immensely harmful to low-income homeowners.

Housing

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the General Assembly has grappled with several critical housing issues. Grounded in Legal Aid Chicago's expertise representing tenants, in 2022 Legal Action provided key negotiating, drafting, and advocacy support to a number of these initiatives.

For example, Legal Action Chicago introduced HB5284, which would have limited a landlord's ability to bar tenants' guests. This is an unfortunately common practice that is disparately applied to people of color living in rental units. Discussions about this practice and potential changes to Illinois' eviction laws are ongoing.

Family Law

Legal Action Chicago plays a critical advocacy role in this arena, where the primary advocates tend to be private attorneys whose clients interact with the court-system differently than the low-income litigants and violence survivors that legal services organizations represent. In 2022, Legal Action Chicago partnered with organizations like the Illinois State Bar Association, the Shriver Center, and the Network to stop well-intentioned legislation that would have harmed low-income survivors of violence or improve legislation so that it did not have unintended consequences on families who have survived violence.

Budget Advocacy

Illinois' FY23 budget was one of the most robust budgets in many years. Spending \$45.986 billion (on projected revenues at \$46.429 billion), the headlines largely focused on significant one-time spending on tax relief, paying off debt, and moving money into the "rainy day fund." However, the budget also contained meaningful expansions of funding in several areas that Legal Action Chicago supported:

- **Earned Income Credit (EIC):** The budget expanded Illinois' EIC to 20 percent of the federal credit. It also made childless workers aged 18-24 and over age 65, as well as immigrants who file taxes with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN),

newly eligible for the EIC.

- **Healthy Illinois:** Advocates were successful in winning another expansion of access to health care, meaning low-income residents aged 42 and older will be able to apply for comprehensive benefits regardless of immigration status.
- **Access to Justice:** While the Governor's budget proposed a reduction of funding to \$10 million, the legislature actually increased the funding to \$20 million for FY23.
- **AABD:** Legal Action began a conversation about increasing Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled assistance. These discussions are ongoing. While we were unsuccessful in getting a significant budget increase for AABD, there was a small increase over FY22.
- **Children's Savings Accounts:** The FY23 budget includes \$2.5 million in funding for Children's Savings Accounts, funding this program for the first time ever and meaning that all children born or adopted in Illinois after December 31, 2022, will receive a \$50 seed deposit in a Bright Start 529 college savings account.
- **Domestic Violence:** Funding for domestic violence programs saw one of (if not the) largest percentage increase in state history, moving from \$20 million to \$70 million.

In terms of our role, Legal Action led the efforts to increase AABD assistance. We also played a significant supporting role in advancing the expansion of health care led by Healthy Illinois (a coalition we are a member of) and Access to Justice, which provides funding for key legal services. We otherwise stood in support of all of the above funding increases.