

## 2023 Legislative Summary

In 2023, Legal Action Chicago worked to improve Illinoisans' lives by leading and supporting legislative initiatives that demand justice for people in poverty. We tackled policy challenges that hinder the effectiveness of legal services and joined forces with other organizations to stop policies that would have burdened people across the state. In the end, we helped spearhead several key policy conversations, ranging from consumer protections to addressing domestic violence and were instrumental in getting some significant pieces of legislations across the finish line.

Here are a few highlights from the legislative session:

### **Children and Families**

This year, Legal Action Chicago worked to improve the rights of children in alternative schools, protect victims of domestic violence, and prevent unnecessary family separation.

#### *Education*

- **SB183**, sponsored by Senator Laura Murphy and Representative Michelle Mussman, was the culmination of a multi-year effort to add clarity and transparency for students transferred to alternative schools.
- Under this legislation, students and parents will be given information about the alternative school upon transfer, be provided with a meeting process to help students transfer back to the regular school program and be given a clear date when the student will return to that program that cannot be extended with the parent's consent.
- This bill passed unanimously out of both chambers and is awaiting signature on the Governor's desk.

#### *Domestic Violence and Child Welfare*

**HB3973**, sponsored by Representative Lakeisha Collins, would reduce trauma and increase healing for children and families by:

- Providing statutory guidance about when the juvenile court should respond to the circumstances of domestic violence by aligning the standard of "environment injurious" with the Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act;
- Creating a presumption that supports keeping children with the parent who experienced domestic violence unless that parent has otherwise caused harm;
- Preserves privilege for domestic violence service providers so that families can fully engage in services.

Legal Action Chicago partnered with Ascend Justice and the Cook County Public Defender, among others, to put forth this legislation. An in-depth subject-matter hearing was held on the bill in April and the coalition is working to advance the issue in the year to come.

**HB1404**, an initiative of The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence in partnership with Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence, would close fatal loopholes in Illinois's

Order of Protection statute that make it difficult to remove guns from a perpetrator of violence. The bill was championed by Representative Maura Hirschauer and—as a part of the firearm omnibus bill **HB676**—the substance of the bill passed the House in May.

Legal Action Chicago provided legal expertise, drafting, and advocacy to the Network throughout the legislative session. The Network and Legal Action Chicago are committed to successfully moving this issue through the Senate when the General Assembly reconvenes.

### **Environmental Justice and Agricultural Worker Rights**

**SB203**, sponsored by Senator Karina Villa and Representative Dagmara Avelar, was introduced in response to a tragic incident in Dewitt County, Illinois in 2019 involving the aerial spraying of a group of farmworkers with pesticides which led to health complications including headaches, eye, skin irritation and vomiting. In partnership with the Environmental Law and Policy Center and the Illinois Environmental Council, Legal Action Chicago successfully negotiated strong new fines for pesticides exposure – likely ten thousands of dollars in a case like the DeWitt County incident. The legislation was originally introduced in 2021 and is a product of years of steadfast effort by Legal Action Chicago, the sponsors, and our amazing partner advocates.

The bill passed both chambers and with bipartisan support and was signed into law in June. .

### **Consumer Protection**

Legal Action Chicago played a key role in supporting a number of consumer bills in the 2023 legislative session:

- We provided testimony and supported **HB3314**, an initiative of the Chicago Bar Association which will allow consumers to be reimbursed for attorney fee in a significant subset of consumer debt lawsuits by creditors. The bill successfully passed the General Assembly in May.
- We partnered with Woodstock Institute and others to successfully oppose **HB1519** – a bill to authorize income share agreements for student loans where student would commit to paying a percentage of their income over a period of decades.

Legal Action also initiated significant campaigns to protect consumers in this legislative session:

- **SB2220**, sponsored by Robert Martwick, would provide needed protections for consumers so that debt collection practices do not strip consumers of all their resources or destabilize their families. This legislation was introduced in partnership with the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulations and passed out of the Senate Judiciary Committee in March. We hope to advance these protections in the session to come.
- **HB1527**, in partnership with Cook County Sheriff’s Office and Woodstock Institute would ban the use of “disablement technology” as a tool to repossess vehicles as a result of consumers’ inability to make payments. The legislation received overwhelming support from the House Rules Committee.

### **Criminal Justice Reform and Reentry**

Legal Action Chicago supported the work of the Fully Free Campaign – a campaign led by people with criminal records – this session. **HB1268**, which eliminated the statutory ban on people with felony convictions serving as an executor of a friend or family member’s estate if the decedent acknowledges that they are aware of the felony in their will, successfully passed the General Assembly this year. People with certain financial exploitation and identity theft convictions remain banned.

### **Budget Advocacy**

**Healthy Illinois:** Legal Action Chicago was an integral part of the Healthy Illinois campaign that advocates for expansion of healthcare for undocumented adults. Despite of concerns about cost, the campaign was successful in maintaining current coverage for adults over and will continue to work to extend coverage to adults aged 19 to 41 in the years to come.

**AABD:** Legal Action Chicago, in partnership with AARP, Legal Council, Access Living and others, continued to work for an increase of Aid to the Aged, Blind and Disabled program.