

LEGAL ACTION CHICAGO

2024 End-of-Session Legislative Summary

In 2024, Legal Action Chicago worked to advance legislative initiatives that would improve quality of life and economic opportunity for people living in poverty and to amend or block legislation that would be harmful. The following report covers highlights and outcomes of the work in the recently concluded General Assembly session.

Consumer Protection

SB 2933, sponsored by Senator Steve Stadelman and Representative Maurice West, will ban hospitals, debt collectors and all creditors from reporting medical debt to the credit bureaus like Equifax and Experian. The bill will help ensure that when a family faces a medical crisis, the financial effects do not follow them long after they have physically healed. This bill is now a law after it has passed out of both chambers of the legislature and received the Governor's signature. Legal Action Chicago provided expert testimony and was the primary organization advocating for the bill.

HB 4891, sponsored by Representative Margaret Croke, amends the Illinois Dental Practice Act. This bill guarantees transparency by providing protection for patients when dentists refer or enroll patients in third-party financing. This bill is awaiting the Governor's signature after it passed out of both the House and Senate. Legal Action was among the core advocates for this bill and provided critical consumer expertise as the legislation advanced.

SB 2220, sponsored by Senator Robert Martwick, expands protections for individuals and families in debt collection by increasing the amount of their home and personal property that they can protect. Illinois has not increased its protections since 2006 and these changes are overdue. Legal Action formed a coalition to promote this legislation, and is one of Legal Action's top priorities.

HB 1527, sponsored by Representative Theresa Mah and Senator Omar Aquino would address the use of the "disablement technology" that can prevent a vehicle from being started or driven. These devices are not regulated in Illinois, which highlights the importance of legislative action on this issue. The bill passed out of committee but has stalled on the House floor. Legal Action will continue to work to ensure consumers are protected when these devices are used.

Housing

Legal Action Chicago led the efforts to stop legislation that would have allowed landlords and law enforcement to circumvent Illinois's eviction process and treat lawful tenants like squatters in their own homes. Legal Action Chicago worked with Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and Housing Action Illinois to address the legislation. In a win for tenants, the bill did not ultimately move.

Children and Families

SB2633, “Karina’s Bill,” sponsored by Representative Maura Hirshauer and Senator Celina Villanueva, will close dangerous loopholes in Illinois’s domestic violence laws and ensure that firearms can be seized from an abuser in an order of protection case. Legal Action Chicago is the primary legal expert on the bill, drafting the legislation and leading negotiations. The bill is led by Legal Action Chicago’s partner - the Network, Advocating Against Domestic Violence, and has received significant coverage and support.

SB378, sponsored by Senator Kimberly Lightford and Representative Kam Buckner would ensure that DCFS and child abuse pediatricians provide vital information to families whose children, in a medical emergency, are being evaluated for child maltreatment, and it provides for data collection on these cases. Legal Action Chicago has provided strategic support to parents at the Family Justice Resource Center, which serves families facing medically based wrongful allegations of abuse and neglect. The legislation passed unanimously out of the Senate and received an extensive subject-matter hearing in the House.

Education

SB1400, sponsored by Senator Kimberly Lightford, is an initiative of the Illinois Education Association to address increased violence against teachers in schools. The language of the legislation and initial amendments would have meant a step backward in Illinois’s response to student discipline and removed critical protections and due process for troubled students. Legal Action Chicago partnered with VOYCE and other advocates to share concerns with the sponsors of the bill. Eventually, we were able to reach agreement with the proponents—without the loss of core student protections—and the bill passed successfully, is currently waiting for the Governor’s signature.

Legal Action Chicago also led efforts to stop legislation that, as introduced, would not just have allowed but *required* every Local School Council for every school in the City of Chicago to contract with the Chicago Police Department to hire a school resource officer. This bill would’ve applied regardless of the level of school (elementary, middle, high), or whether the local community wanted it, and contained no safeguards or standards.

State Budget

AABD Cash - Aid for the Aged, Blind and Disabled, is a budget initiative aimed at increasing monthly cash aid to the state's lowest income older adults and people with disabilities. To focus attention on this budget issue, Legal Action also filed bills in both chambers in order to recruit co-sponsors and elevate the issue in committee hearings. SB 3436 (sponsored by Senator David Koehler) and HB 5267 (sponsored by Representative Camille Lilly) provide for a four-year path for AABD participants to receive (through AABD and Supplemental Security Income combined) at least the amount of assistance equal to the federal poverty line. Legal Action Chicago provided expert testimony in the House and Senate in support of the increased appropriation, but it did not make the final budget and we will continue to push for meaningful AABD benefits in the years to come.

HBIA/HBIS – Healthcare Benefits for Immigrant Adults/ Healthcare Benefits for Immigrant Seniors. Legal Action is a member of the core leadership committee of the Healthy Illinois Campaign, a very large coalition promoting comprehensive health coverage for immigrants regardless of immigration status. Due to the long advocacy on these issues and the building of strong champions in the legislature, the Pritzker Administration decided to support the current program and the Governor, for the first time, included \$629 million to fully fund it in his budget message in February. Legal Action worked with the coalition to ensure that the full appropriation stayed in the final budget. This appropriation keeps funding at the same level as the prior year, ensuring that 70,000 people in the program will not be forced off of their much needed healthcare coverage.

Housing Investments. Legal Action supported successful efforts of partner organizations to win important investments in the state budget to address the housing crisis facing many Illinoisans, including support for legal services, supportive housing, and court-based rental assistance.

Additional legislation: Legal Action Chicago also gave brief advice or lobbying and on-the-record support for the following legislation pursued by allies and partners:

HB 4768, the Landlord Retaliation Act which prohibits landlords from terminating tenancy, increasing rent, decreasing services, and refusing to renew a lease when the tenant files a complaint about building code violation or requests landlord to make necessary repair.

HB 277, amends the Illinois Vehicle Code to end suspension of driver's licenses for failure to appear in court for traffic tickets for suspensions after January 1, 2020. Illinois will join twelve other states that no longer restrict driving privileges for failure to appear in court.

HB 4471, modifies the current 2024 sunset date of our state's Energy Assistance Act. This bill ensures undocumented persons can still enroll in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in Illinois.