

Legal Action Chicago

2026 Policy Advocacy Summary

In 2026, Legal Action Chicago worked to advance an array of legislation to improve the quality of life and economic opportunity for people living in poverty in Illinois. Our work focused on fighting for equitable access to justice, increasing consumer protections, securing just and equitable housing and utilities practices, supporting children and families, and protecting public benefits.

Here are some of the highlights:

Affirmative State Legislation

HB4456 - Reducing Energy Burden Among Low-Income Communities

Illinois' low-income communities spend nearly a fifth of their household income on energy – more than 6 times higher than is considered affordable. The result is an energy affordability crisis for families living in Illinois. The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) addresses the energy affordability crisis by providing financial assistance to hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans who otherwise might face disconnection.

HB4456 vastly expands the number of households who can get energy relief by extending eligibility for LIHEAP from 200% to 300% of the federal poverty level and stops a small surcharge from increasing bills in 2027. The bill also clarifies the General Assembly's authorization of low-income utility discount rates ("LIDRs") and locks in key protections already approved by the Illinois Commerce Commission.

HB4456 is projected to save Illinois consumers over \$100 million per year.

This bill successfully passed in both houses and was signed into law as Public Act 104-0540. HB4456 was sponsored by Rep. Laura Faver Dias and Sen. Adriane Johnson. We are proud to have spearheaded this work with the Illinois Association of Community Action and the National Consumer Law Center.

SB3329 - Updating Karina's Law

In 2025, the General Assembly passed Karina's Law, which closes loopholes in the Order of Protections statutes to allow courts to order the seizure of firearms when there is a risk to a survivor, including on an emergency basis. As with any major piece of legislation, throughout the law's implementation, which went into effect in May of 2025, we discovered the need for some clarifications and revisions.

SB3329 makes some of these important and clarifying changes to Karina's Law, including by providing that law enforcement will take reasonable steps to notify survivors if they intend to seek an extension or negate a warrant that was issued in their case.

This bill, which we advanced in partnership with The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence, successfully passed both houses and was signed into law as Public Act 104-0506. SB2239 was sponsored by Sen. Celina Villaneueva and Rep. Maura Hirshauer.

SB3398 - Protecting Home Ownership for Low-Income Families

When a person dies without a will, their house may be split between family members. Sometimes, only one person lives there, pays the bills and taxes, and takes care of it. If one of the family members disappears or doesn't engage, the caretaker of the home is often stuck—they cannot fix the property, get a loan, or sell without other family members' permission.

SB 3398 provides a tool for lower-income families to stay in, improve, and become the full, legal owners of their family houses by creating a legal pathway for the person inheriting and caring for the property to petition for sole ownership.

This bill successfully passed both houses and has been sent to the governor's desk. SB3398 was championed by Rep. Jennifer Gong Gershowitz and Sen. Robert Martwick.

Supporting Positive Changes, Defending Against Harmful Ones

In addition to directly spearheading legislation, Legal Action Chicago also provides a critical legal services perspective in Springfield. Sometimes, as happened in 2026, that means working with allies on efforts to address gaps in protective order enforcement that would have had unintended consequences. It can also mean lifting up the unique impact proposed legislation may have on people experiencing poverty, as with our work to successfully remove harmful changes to the Probate Act proposed in SB2951. Other times, it means helping to support critical legislation to improve the notice and process rights of parents interacting with DCFS in a medical emergency, as happened with HB3169.

We are profoundly grateful for the exceptional work of our partners and allies in this session who advanced legislation that we supported. And we truly appreciate the willingness of legislators—and often our opponents—to listen to our concerns and make changes to their proposals.

City-Level Advocacy

Blocking the Parental Liability Ordinance

In June 2026, the Chicago City Council was slated to vote on a proposed amendment to chapter 8-16 of the municipal code, which addresses offenses by or against minors. The amendment would have dramatically increase financial penalties for minors, in some cases by 500 times, and extended liability to parents and guardians for children's conduct, leading to doubling punishments on families by fining both minors and their households. The proposal would have ultimately criminalized poverty and homelessness.

We worked with over 40 organizations, including the Cook County Public Defender's office, to successfully urge the City Council to reject the amendment.

Water for All (W4A)

Since 2024, we have campaigned with the Water for All Coalition to expand Chicago's utility billing relief program to people with slightly higher incomes and living in additional types of housing, while also prohibiting the practice of using liens to recover unpaid water bills.

Chicago's existing program lets people sign up for discounted water bills if they have utility debts, and, if they make on-time payments for a year, have the debts wiped away. These changes, supported by a coalition that includes Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation, the Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and Blacks in Green, would help to ensure more families in the City can afford an essential service. In 2026, our advocacy continued as we and our sponsor, Alderman Daniel La Spata, pushed forward towards a committee vote on the Water for All proposal.