



NEWS



Advocacy Day 2003 A Big

A publication of the Illinois Community Action Association

The mission of Illinois Community Action Association's (ICAA) is to mobilize information and people in order to increase awareness of the needs of the poor, who they serve and what community action programs are available. Increased awareness stimulates continued and new support which and ultimate survival of community action programs. ICAA sponsors Day on March 11th, 2003. This event will be a day of organizing and promoting policy initiatives that will impact the lives of the poor. This beginning of dialogue between the General Assembly and Governor's Office will be a significant step in the process of promoting policy initiatives that will impact the lives of the poor.

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The Illinois Community Action Association is a membership organization which serves as the network for Illinois' not-for-profit corporations and units of government which strive to raise the health, education and economic standards of Illinois' citizens living at the lower social and economic margins. The Association serves the collective interests of its members through representation, educational programs, information exchange, advocacy and other support services.





Congressional Reactions to ICAA's Reauthorization Positions

On March 2nd thru March 7th, 2003, ICAA staff traveled to Washington D.C. to attend both the NCAF conference and scheduled Congressional visits. The visits enable us to advocate for community action as well as gauge Congressional delegates' attitudes on the administration's budget proposal and prepare our next plan of action accordingly. ICAA staff met with the following delegates:

- Representative John Shimkus' office;
- Speaker Dennis Hastert's office;
- Representative Ray LaHood;
- Representative Tim Johnson's office;
- Senator Dick Durbin's office;
- Senator Peter Fitzgerald's office.

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In each of the meetings ICAA staff focused on the specific issues that were identified at the February Roundtable discussion as the most important. The areas of concern included the reauthorization of the LIHEAP, CSBG and Head Start Programs. The following is a summation of the Congressional responses subsequent to ICAA's discussion on these three topics:

The LIHEAP talking points were non-controversial and supported by each congressional delegate with whom ICAA talked. They all expressed support for the objectives of the program and the need for additional resources to adequately fund it.

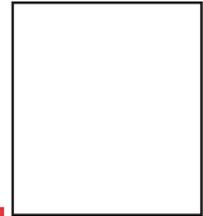
ICAA staff met with Mike Stokie, Speaker Hastert's Chief of Staff. Although he was aware of the CSBG program, he questioned our position that Faith Based organizations should not receive CSBG funding. He stated that "there are pocket areas in this country that are inadequately served". He went further to state that "it is in these areas that the church is the only hope for those communities". He referred to the southwest side of Bloomington and East Springfield to support his methodology. ICAA staff emphasized the fact that community action has service areas that span all 102 counties in the state of Illinois, and specifically target both urban and rural areas with poverty. ICAA staff also mentioned that Community Action Agencies have been partnering with the faith based community for years in order to better facilitate the services that are provided to the low income population, and that many Community Action Agencies initially evolved from a faith based setting.

In response, the ICAA network needs to inundate the speaker's office with collective outcome reports. It must be shown that we extend our services to all parts of the state and deal with every low-income population. There is also a need to demonstrate the existing partnerships with local faith based organizations.

Representative LaHood was previously unaware of the proposal to give CSBG money to faith-based organizations, but gave the impression that he did not support it.

The Head Start position yielded several interesting responses. None of the delegates were in favor of moving the Head Start program to the Department of Education. Some of the responses included, "We have heard no compelling arguments as to why the move to DOE would be a wise choice," (The Speakers Office) and "Head Start has been in HHS for over 38 years, why dump it on DOE when they have so many things to deal with already." However, despite these seemingly positive responses, more action must be taken to secure that congressional delegates understand and agree with our positions.

**A Few
Words
From:**



Dear Members,

We have started this year off with a concerted focus on policy and legislative issues directly impacting the work of Community Action. On the federal level we are faced with the reauthorizations of Head Start, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the Community Services Block Grant, all of which are at the core of what we do in the Community Action movement. We have been proactive as a network by working together in developing positions which we believe to be the essential components of these programs that need to be considered by Congress.

On February 13, 2003 many of you converged in Springfield to participate in the Round Table discussions which led to the development of position papers for these three very important programs. These positions have been articulated and shared with our members of Congress and it is encouraging to know that many of you will be conducting follow up visits with members of Congress during the Easter recess. It is also important that members of Congress and other individuals in the policy making arena are invited to visit your agencies so that they can see first hand how resources they appropriate in Congress are being effectively utilized by Community Action in Illinois.

On the state level we are faced with the budgetary woes that every state under the Union is facing. However, we should not assume the defeatist approach and become complacent, but that we should seize this environment as an opportunity for action. This resonates well with the theme for this year's advocacy conference which was "Stand up and fight". Community Action in Illinois through the Association has been working with the new administration and members of the legislature to explore different ways to fund low income programs in an environment that promises little growth and less new initiatives. Your participation in the Advocacy Day activities sent a message to policy makers that our movement is not static but very much in action to safeguard services to our low income customers.

Finally, I would like to encourage you to contact Director of Public Policy, John Colgan, Holly Copeland Lasley or myself for clarification on any of the positions we have taken as an organization on our national issues as well as state issues. This edition of the ICAA News outlines all these positions with reports on the outcomes of the meetings held on policy matters.

Many thanks to all those who participated in these policy meetings and continue to do so on behalf of Community Action and those whom we serve. Carpe Diem! And Keep the light shining!



Dalitso Sulamoyo
Executive Director
Illinois Community Action Association



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Illinois Community Action Association holds roundtable discussion on CSBG, LIHEAP and Head Start

In response to major threats to base funding and program reauthorization for the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG), the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and Head Start (HS), the Illinois Community Action Association (ICAA) hosted a day long Community Action Roundtable Discussion on February 13th, 2003 in order to clearly assess ICAA's position and to develop a statewide action plan to advocate for these core Community Action Programs. The meeting was held at ICAA's training facility in Springfield. With approximately one half of its 40 members represented, the session focused on reauthorization strategies and a call to action for all 40 Community Action Agencies. A full position statement on CSBG reauthorization is available from ICAA. Full position statements for LIHEAP and Head Start will be available from ICAA very soon. The following basic positions were agreed to by the membership.

Community Service Block Grant (CSBG)

The Community Service Block Grant provides core funding for the anti-poverty efforts of the national Community Action Network. Through this network, CAA's have created, coordinated and delivered a broad array of comprehensive services to low-income Americans for over 30 years. ICAA believes the following basic principals should be included in CSBG reauthorization.

1. Funding levels for reauthorization should reflect (at a minimum) level funding and every effort should be made to increase the funding levels.
2. The CSBG rule which requires that ninety percent of the CSBG dollars be passed through state governments to eligible CAA entities should be continued.

3. The CSBG legislation should retain language, which specifies that grantees of the CSBG must have tripartite governing boards, which include 1) representation from low-income residents, 2) elected officials, and 3) business and community leaders.

4. Faith Based Organizations - ICAA respectfully reject any attempts to fund faith-based initiatives at the expense of the Community Services Block Grant. Now that considerable debate has occurred on the so called faith-based initiative, ICAA is concerned about the Constitutional, civil rights, and taxpayer accountability implications of this measure.

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

The LIHEAP Program is vital in helping low-income seniors, families and people with disabilities with their home energy costs, and in the process, helps prevent homelessness, hunger and sickness. LIHEAP assistance also allows poor families to purchase the essentials such as food, clothing and medications. The average American family pays approximately 5% of its income towards energy bills while a low-income family typically pays more than 20% of its income toward energy bills. ICAA believes the following basic principals must be included in LIHEAP reauthorization.

1. Funding levels for reauthorization should reflect (at a minimum) level funding and every effort should be made to increase the funding levels.
2. Maintain current rules that allow states flexibility to determine what income levels are appropriate for LIHEAP eligibility.
3. Maintain current requirements that out-

reach activities be conducted to inform the public of the program and to ensure that low-income people are aware of the LIHEAP program and other related services.

4. Maintain the current regulation that States may use an amount not to exceed 10 percent of its LIHEAP funds for a fiscal year for planning and administering the use of funds under this title.

Head Start (HS)

The current administration is intent on making dramatic changes to the Head Start program.

These changes include:

- Refocus Head Start on school readiness
- Improve teacher training
- Mandate a system to assess the success of Head Start programs in preparing children for school
- Give Governors more control over Head Start
- Give the Department of Education full control over the Head Start program by 2005.

While ICAA agrees that the Head Start can

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(cont. from pg. 1)

Pat Quinn, the lieutenant governor was the keynote speaker for the morning session. He was very supportive of the community action agenda particularly the energy issues. A large contingent of the membership was there to welcome the lieutenant governor. 29 and of the 40 member agencies were represented at the event which amounted to over 80 staff in attendance.

The afternoon was devoted to visiting state representatives at the capitol. Several ICAA members and ICAA staff made visits to the state capitol to meet with their representatives to share their positions on key legislation and reiterate the important role of community action agencies in enabling low income citizens to become more self sufficient.

The impact of Advocacy Day will not be fully realized until the end of this legislative session.

and should be improved, many of these changes are already taking place. ICAA will conclude its full position statement in the near future, but the following positions on Head Start reauthorization are generally agreed:

1. The Head Start Program should remain a federal program administered by the Department of Health and Human Services.
2. Head Start funding should be increased in order to improve the service quality and to expand the program so that all eligible children are given the opportunity to participate.
3. Allow all complying Head Start programs to serve children from birth through age 5 when community assessment demonstrates need.
4. Change the 20 percent matching requirement by establishing an automatic hardship waiver and only apply the rule to base funding.

ICAA's position papers will be posted to the ICAA website <http://www.icaanet.com>. ■



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Food Security Activity Revs Up

ICAA has been involved in a flurry of food security activity beginning with hosting a news conference, covered by both radio and TV, on February 26, 2003. Here the Food Stamp Participation study was released. This study analyzes the number of individuals financially eligible for the Food Stamp Program in comparison to the number of individuals actually participating in the Food Stamp Program. The results, listed county by county, are dismal. The overall participation rate for the entire state was found to be only 55%. ICAA's hope is that the study will assist in the acquisition of additional funds to expand its food stamp outreach efforts. Outreach will get hungry families the food they need and develop a hefty, untapped revenue source by bringing federal food stamp money into the state economy.

ICAA's Food Stamp Outreach Project, through local advertising and media campaigns, has generated 610 hotline phone calls and 82 approved applications to local Department of Human Service offices. The four Food Stamp Outreach Project sites include the Peoria Citizen's Committee for Economic Opportunity, Madison County Community Development, Champaign County Regional Planning Commission and Project NOW. A family of three, on average, receives \$2,688 annually in food stamp benefits. Conse-

quently, the outreach efforts have successfully brought **\$220,416** annually into the state's economy. In addition, the Food, Research and Action Center (FRAC) stated that for every food stamp dollar spent, it generates an additional \$9.00 in economic activity. According to these figures, the first two quarters of our outreach project have already potentially generated nearly **\$1.2 million** annually in state economic activity. WOW....now that's ROMA!

The project has also successfully identified a lack of transportation and job constraints to be significant barriers in preventing eligible individuals from participating in the Food Stamp Program. Consequently, the ICAA has met with the Bureau of Food Stamps director and several efforts are underway to alleviate those barriers. The ICAA is pleased with the success of the program thus far and has more planned for the project in the coming year.

ICAA is working with the national leader in hunger advocacy, FRAC, in drafting a position paper summarizing its recommendations for the reauthorization of the federal Child Nutrition Programs in 2003. These programs include WIC, the Summer Food Program, the School Breakfast Program, and the Child & Adult Care Food Program. ■



RCAP RECAP

RCAP National Training Institute



Illinois RCAP staff, John Bowersmith and Art Gatermann, attended the 2003 Annual RCAP National Training Institute in Tempe Arizona in January. This comprehensive training focused on the areas of drinking water, wastewater, and solid waste. The training courses were developed to meet the specific needs of our Technical Assistance Providers. In addition to gaining technical expertise, the RCAP staff also explored best practices for program management and implementation.

The Illinois RCAP staff now have a better understanding for participatory approaches in community based strategic planning and implementation. This approach helps communities focus on what they desire in the long term and how to set goals and priorities to achieve results. Most projects can take up to 3 to 5 years to complete. By utilizing long term planning, communities can bring a realistic understanding unification and support, in order to improve services provided. Additionally, the communities are encouraged to develop tools for local evaluation techniques, and to quantify outcomes for funders, government agencies, and other parties with similar interest.

Currently, there's much discussion amongst the RCAP personnel concerning communities selling off their water systems to private firms. This is a growing trend that could be problematic. On the surface it appears as a good idea to a small community, but in the long run it can be quite costly to the customer base. Contemplating all the issues and options can be better guided by the objective assistance RCAP provides as opposed to that of a private firm. ■



Congressional Reactions...

(cont. from pg. 2)

Senator Ms. Hillary Clinton spoke at the NCAF Conference and echoed these same sentiments on Head Start. She also stressed the need for Community Action Agencies across the nation, now more than ever. She reiterated that each community action agency must take the initiative to build relationships with their local congressional delegates; this is the only way to ensure that they recognize and understand the need for community action within their local districts.

It is a necessity that all of our members follow up with local office meetings during the Easter recess (Spring District Work Period) April 14th – 25th, to ensure success. ■

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