

Illinois Community Action Association's Legislative & Policy Agenda 2006

Outlined below is a draft of the legislative and policy agenda for the Illinois Community Action Association for 2006. The agenda is divided into Illinois and Federal sections. Within the State and Federal sections the agenda items are divided by: Legislative Issues; Administrative Issues; and Organizational Issues. The agenda was approved by the ICAA Board on 12.11.05 and by the ICAA membership on 12.12.05.

I. Illinois Issues

A. Illinois General Assembly Issues: Appropriations and Legislation

1. Securing an increased appropriation for the Family and Community Development (FCD) Program will be a top state priority for ICAA.

The main goal for FCD is to re-establish funding levels of at least \$325,000 in the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Budget. The current IDHS Budget has FCD funded at \$75,000.

A secondary goal is to establish a better working relationship with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to promote the FCD concept. ICAA staff will educate the IDHS staff of the potential FCD has for fulfilling the "One Stop Shop" concept of the current administration and call attention to the need to grow FCD in a manner that will help low-income people to achieve self-sufficiency.

2. Affordable housing will be a high priority for the ICAA network.

- ICAA will continue its membership in the Housing Action Illinois (formerly the Statewide Housing Action Coalition or SHAC), and the Housing Roundtable. ICAA will work with these organizations and support their advocacy efforts for affordable housing resources. ICAA will actively promote the "It Takes a Home to Raise a Child Campaign" agenda. The key components of the campaign currently include:

- Increasing funding in the FY 2007 budget for the IDHS Homeless Prevention Program from \$5 million to \$11 million. The annual struggle to fund this program has also been paired with an attempt to secure the homeless prevention money from a source other than TANF in order to further broaden the range of beneficiaries beyond TANF recipients.

- Monitoring implementation of the Campaign's Rental Housing Support Program, passed in the Spring of 2005. The Illinois Housing Development Authority will administer the program. In 2006, IHDA will issue a Request for Proposals to eligible local administering organizations, including Community Action Agencies. The program is a statewide rental subsidy program that would make payments directly to landlords for households earning 30% of the Average Median Income (AMI) or less for their area. An effort will also begin to supplement program resources to make program coverage universal in the state.

- ICAA will continue to participate in the activities of the Governor's Housing Task Force. ICAA will monitor legislation that the Governor has said he will submit to codify and institutionalize his executive order on housing. ICAA will work in coalition with other organizations to shape the key issues contained in this legislation.

- ICAA will continue to support legislation protecting Illinois residents from housing discrimination based on their source of income.

- ICAA will work in coalition with other housing advocates to prevent raids by the Administration on funding for the Illinois Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

- ICAA will continue to work with the Illinois House - Housing and Urban Development Committee, and the Illinois Senate - Housing and Community Affairs Committee to make housing issues more of a priority within the Administration.

- ICAA supports funding the Prevention of Unnecessary Institutionalization Act. The law is already on the books, but has had no appropriations. The Act provides home modification grants so that people with disabilities can live in their own homes, instead of institutions.

3. ICAA will continue to work in coalition with its membership and numerous other organizations to adopt the Affordable Energy Plan:

ICAA staff has been meeting for the three years with a working group of providers and advocates to discuss how to proceed with future energy policy in Illinois. Most of those discussions have centered on how to provide more affordable energy services to low-income people. Below is a summary of what is in the Affordable Energy Plan.

The plan has several key components to it:

(1) A Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP): L-I customers can agree to make monthly PIPP payment of 10% of their income for their energy bill. The remaining energy balance would be paid from a portfolio of cost containment measures proposed in the Act.

(2) Energy Efficiency: Energy efficiency is an important component of this plan because efficient use of energy help will reduce program costs by lowering participant heating bills. The Act will target households with the highest energy costs for weatherization services and low-cost efficiency strategies for all participants.

(3) Hedging of Natural Gas Prices: The volume of natural gas consumed by the participants in the PIPP program will be estimated and hedging options will be purchased for a portion of the program. This will stabilize the natural gas costs and avoid the volatility of market fluctuations in cold winters.

(4) An Automatic Reconnection Rule: Tens of thousands of Illinois residents are disconnected from utilities due to large unpaid balances. This creates an ongoing health and safety crisis. This Act will codify an affordable reconnection plan for the lesser of \$250 payment or a payment of 20% of the bill.

(5) Reporting requirements for utilities: Public utilities will have to report to the Illinois Commerce Commission various data concerning LIHEAP accounts including information on overdue payments and other information concerning disconnections from service.

(6) A portfolio of cost containment and revenue enhancement options: These options include good faith payment credits; measures that will stabilize the cost of LIHEAP natural gas; and program savings that will be realized through program efficiencies and a redistribution of available LIHEAP funds.

4. ICAA will work with the Policy Advisory Council and IL Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS) to more effectively implement the Good Samaritan Energy Plan Act.

ICAA will work with the Policy Advisory Council and IDHFS to more effectively implement this program during 2006.

5. ICAA will maintain its activities to promote and advocate for Federal Nutrition Programs as a part of the Community Food and Nutrition Program.

Through the Community Food and Nutrition Program, ICAA will maintain an active presence in anti-hunger issues. ICAA will work with its membership, the IL Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the IL Department of Human Services, the IL State Board of Education, nutrition advocates and the IL School Management Alliance as a part of CFNP activities. Specifically, ICAA staff will support program activities and legislative initiatives designed to expand Illinois outreach activities for federal nutrition programs.

B. Illinois Administrative Issues

1. ICAA will continue to work with its membership and the IDHFS to ensure that the LIHEAP new system becomes fully functional during the 2006 program year.

The LIHEAP Program was moved from DCEO to IDHFS during the 2004 program year. While a lot of progress has been made over the past two years, there continue to be unresolved program and relationship issues associated with this move. Most of the issues continue to be centered on the LIHEAP.NET system that IDHFS designed and implemented in 2004 and then redesigned and implemented in 2005.

ICAA will work to ensure that the problems are solved and the partnership between ICAA, its membership network and IDHFS are improved over the next year.

2. ICAA will actively work to strengthen partnerships with DCEO, IDHFS and the Illinois Department of Human Services.

ICAA will work to advance the goal of solidifying relationships with these departments in a manner that educates state government departments of the importance of ICAA, its membership network, its mission, and its capacity to conduct the ongoing struggle to achieve self-sufficiency.

Specifically, ICAA will work to ensure that LIHEAP, IHWAP, and CSBG resources will continue to be channeled through ICAA and its membership network to assist low-income people with the services funded by these programs. ICAA will work with IDHFS and the Illinois General Assembly (if needed) to ensure that LIHEAP resources will be channeled through no other networks other than ICAA. Also, ICAA will also vigorously oppose any efforts to channel these resources through any network other than ICAA.

3. ICAA will explore the possibility of including the ICAA network in the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund.

C. Illinois Organizational Issues

1. ICAA will increase the understanding of the interrelation of ICAA and the Illinois Community Action Fund (ICAF).

There is an ongoing need to understand the relationship ICAA has with the ICAF Political Action Committee (PAC). This is important for three reasons: 1) ICAA's strategic plan emphasizes the importance of increasing the visibility and influence of ICAA with the Governor's Office, the General Assembly and the Illinois Congressional delegation; 2) To effectively participate in the Illinois public policy arena, it is important to be active with policy makers on an ongoing basis. One important method of maintaining this presence is through a PAC; and 3) There are important legal issues governing these activities that need to be clearly understood.

ICAA will work with ICAF to ensure that a strategic planning process is completed to clarify these issues and strengthen the capacity for advocacy within the ICAA network.

2. There is a need to increase the capacity of the network to understand and participate in coordinated public policy activities.

In December of 2004, ICAA adopted a grassroots advocacy plan. ICAA staff has been working to implement the plan and increase the capacity of the ICAA network regarding participation in coordinated public policy activities. ICAA will continue to implement this plan to expand the network's knowledge and abilities concerning organizing and advocacy issues. ICAA will work actively to increase the membership in the Grassroots Club and to educate the Club members on important advocacy issues. ICAA will mobilize the Grassroots Club to take appropriate action on issues that will either advance or threaten the ICAA network.

3. Explore possibilities for advocating a solution to the state deficit by working with the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability. Specific recommendations for action will come back to the Legislative Committee for discussion and possible endorsements.

4. Explore issues surrounding the NCAP branding campaign and ICAA's position with it.

The name has of the Community Action Association has been officially changed to the National Community Action Partnership (NCAP) and the national network has established a national branding campaign. Some members of ICAA have opposed this campaign while others have adopted it. ICAA will continue to discuss whether to endorse the campaign. If we do not endorse the existing plan, ICAA will work to develop its own branding campaign in Illinois.

II. Federal Issues

A. Federal Legislation and Appropriations

1. A top ICAA priority will continue to be the completion of the legislative process to reauthorization of the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG). The CSBG provides core funding for the anti-poverty efforts of the national Community Action Network. As the only mandated anti-

poverty network in the country, it is composed of more than 1,120 CAA's, covering 96 percent of the counties in the U.S. 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 will continue to advocate the CSBG reauthorization process and will follow its own legislative priorities for CSBG. For national leadership, ICAA will look to the National Community Action Fund (NCAF) to help establish the CSBG priorities for the reauthorization throughout the year of 2006.

2. ICAA will actively oppose any proposed cuts to annual CSBG appropriations. Even when the reauthorization process is completed, there will be an annual struggle to be sure the CSBG Program is funded at an appropriate level. In 2004, the President proposed a \$150 million cut to the annual CSBG funding. In 2005, the President proposed the total elimination of the CSBG program by combining it with the CDBG Program and significantly cutting the resources. While this proposal did not move in Congress in 2005, it is not yet known what will happen in 2006. All indications are that the current Administration will continue to try and cut resources for CSBG.

Considering the current impact of the Census Bureau poverty data and the funding level changes that are resulting for many downstate CAA's, a cut in CSBG would be very detrimental to Illinois CAA's. An elimination of CSBG all together, would be even more detrimental and would in effect eliminate the mandate that CAAs have to fight poverty in Illinois and in America. ICAA will counter criticisms and proposed funding cuts by communication with the Illinois Congressional delegation by making certain they understand the effectiveness and importance of the CSBG program in Illinois. These communications will be conducted in coordination with the National Community Action Fund when appropriate.

3. ICAA will actively promote increased funding for LIHEAP and will actively oppose any proposed cuts to program. LIHEAP was reauthorized in 2005 and the funding level was set at \$5 billion. While this amount only reflects the top end of what Congress can appropriate on an annual basis for LIHEAP, ICAA will work to secure this amount of funding in 2006. In keeping with ICAA's attempts to increase LIHEAP funding, ICAA will likewise counter any proposals that would attempt to cut LIHEAP funding. ICAA will do this by communication with the Illinois Congressional delegation as to the effectiveness and importance of the program. These communications will be conducted in coordination with the National Community Action Fund when appropriate.

4. ICAA will also work in coalition with its membership and the Illinois Head Start Association to make the completion of the reauthorization of the Head Start Program a priority for 2006.

While CSBG and LIHEAP will be ICAAs top federal priorities, ICAA will also continue to stay abreast of Head Start issues by participating in the information flow that comes from the National Head Start Association and the Illinois Head Start Association.

- ICAA will also stay in touch with NCAF and NCAP on this important issue.

- ICAA will keep members informed of action when appropriate and ICAA will make appropriate calls to the Illinois delegation when appropriate.

- ICAA will stay informed on controversial issues surrounding reauthorization including: Increased teacher requirements; new procedures for review and replacement of providers; and whether funding is being taken from Head Start to fund other pressing issues such as disaster relief.

5. ICAA will work in coalition with national housing advocates.

- **ICAA will work in coalition with national housing advocates to support full funding for federal Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV).** The Administration's proposed funding level will not fully fund all currently authorized vouchers. Full funding is necessary to support families currently receiving assistance. ICAA will also oppose the Administration's proposed block granting of HCV. With the current problems of state budget deficits, block granted funds could tempt governors and state legislators to creatively redirect block grant funds for other purposes.

- **ICAA will track the Congressional process to reauthorize and renew funding for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.** The primary programs under the act are entailed in HUD's Supportive Housing Program, which involves both transitional and permanent housing with associated ongoing supportive services for homeless persons. ICAA will promote the concept that permanent housing must serve persons with disabilities that include mental illness, physical disabilities, or substance abuse. Many CAAs receive funds granted through the HUD-administered Act. McKinney-Vento programs are coordinated through local Continuums of Care in which Community Action Agencies play key roles.

- **ICAA will stay abreast of developing issues with the housing production** funding channeled through the HUD's HOME Program, and through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, and when appropriate will take action to preserve and protect these important federal programs.

- **ICAA will work in coalition with national housing advocates to promote the Services to End Long-Term Homelessness Act (SELHA)** (also known as the Ending Long Term Homelessness Services Initiative or "ELHSI") that seeks federal funding for the supportive services component of supportive housing. This will directly benefit CAAs that administer such programs. SELHA compliments the state-level effort to obtain services match from the Illinois General Assembly.

- **ICAA will continue its support of the creation of the National Housing Trust Fund as a source of funding for low income housing development.**

- **ICAA will monitor implementation of the newly enacted Affordable Housing Fund.** The fund is the first new program for the creation of affordable housing in some years, but is encumbered with restrictions on the eligibility of nonprofit organizations and their participation in lawful legislative and voter registration activities, even when this is done with their own unrelated and unrestricted funds. Nonprofits receiving money under the act, may not even associate with organizations that lobby or have voter registration or similar programs. For-profit organizations are exempted from the restrictions.

6. TANF Reauthorization

Congress was scheduled to reauthorize the TANF program in 2002. As of November 2005, this reauthorization has not yet been completed. ICAA will continue to monitor this reauthorization process. ICAA will continue to promote TANF reauthorization based on the position paper we published in 2002. ICAA will strongly promote a reauthorization proposal that among other issues adds additional resources for child care. ICAA will work against efforts to increase the required work provisions of TANF participants.

7. Faith Based Organizations

The Community Action network continues to have an overall sense of concern about Charitable Choice and the President's faith-based initiatives in particular. Charitable Choice language was

inserted in the Community Services Block Grant in 1998 with no hearings, no debate, and no vote. ICAA will continue to express its concerns about the Constitutional, civil rights, and taxpayer accountability implications of this measure. ICAA will continue to support Community Action Agencies in Illinois that work hand-in-hand with churches and faith-based organizations the same as they have for more than three decades of serving the poor. ICAA will advocate that faith-based organizations are already being supported with CSBG resources because: they continue to rely on CAAs to administer the programs their congregations support; they rely on CAAs to act as fiscal agents for joint projects; they count on CAAs to supply sub-grants for food, shelter, and other basic needs; and because CAAs work to involve faith based groups in advocating for the community's children, minorities, homeless, and other disadvantaged populations.

8. ICAA will continue to be involved with various Asset Development strategies.

- If not completed by the end of 2005, ICAA will continue to track and support the reauthorization of the Assets for Independence Act (AFIA). ICAA now operates two AFIA programs through the ICAA IDA program. The continuation of this program will continue to offer low-income people the opportunity to receive 2:1 matched savings for the purchase of a home, for post secondary education, and for small business start up costs.

- ICAA will continue to work with Illinois Asset Building Group (IABG). ICAA staff has been participating in a policy discussion regarding an asset based approach to anti-poverty issues. This group was convened by the Woods Fund of Chicago with the assistance of the Asset Development Institute of Brandeis University. This will be an ongoing effort that will possibly result in policy recommendations in the spring of 2006. These policy recommendations will be submitted to the ICAA legislative committee for consideration of support.

- ICAA will advocate for the Savings for Working Families Act. This is a proposed federal IDA Tax Credit that would make \$450 million available in IDA Tax Credits to match the savings of working families and would allow for up to 300,000 IDAs to be created. The IDA Tax Credit would work by providing financial institutions with a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for every dollar they contribute as matching funds for IDAs, up to \$500 per IDA per year. The Credit would substantially expand the amount of matching funds available for IDAs and cement them as an asset-building tool for low-income Americans in the federal tax system.

B. Federal Administrative Issues

1. ICAA will stay informed concerning allocation formulas used by DCEO & IDHFS to distribute federal LIHEAP, IWHAP and CSBG resources to the ICAA network. ICAA will continue to monitor this issue closely and work with the membership and state departments to develop a plan for lessening the impact of formulas, especially the effect on rural CAA's in Illinois.

C. Federal Organizational Issues

1. ICAA will continue its membership and support of both NCAF and NCAP at the national level.

2. ICAA will continue to maintain good working relationships with the HHS/OCS, NASCSAP and NEADA.