



Support important revenue reforms:

Write a letter to the editor of your local news outlet

Illinois leaders are scheduled to wrap-up their state budget work in May. However, their efforts could fall far short of what children and families need: a full year's worth of funding that's adequate to protect vital public services from deep cuts or even elimination.

It's important that Illinoisans encourage their elected leaders today to avoid deep budget cuts that would harm communities. One of the best ways to raise your voice is through the opinion pages of your local newspaper. Even many letters that don't make it into print are published online.

I. Tips for writing your letter and getting it published:

- **Keep your letter brief and focused.** A length of no more than 200-250 words is a good goal; some newspapers set strict limits on the length of letter they'll consider publishing.
- **Personalize your letter to strengthen its credibility and impact.** Wherever possible, cite specific, local examples of current or proposed budget cuts that you've seen threatening harm to kids and families. Examples include teacher layoffs and their effects on class sizes, elimination or reduction of specific social services, the erosion of municipal services such as police, fire department and library resources, etc.
- **Referring to earlier news reports can increase your chances of publication.** Even if you haven't experienced the effects of budget cuts firsthand, it's fairly easy to refer in your letter to a previous news story, editorial or letter to the editor. For example: "I write to express concern about how students' learning will suffer in our state-budget nightmare, as your newspaper reported recently ('150 teacher layoffs approved,' April 10 Chicago Tribune)..."

II. Main messages to include in your letter: You can pick and choose among the messages in the four sections below, to craft a letter with which you're comfortable. Wherever possible, remember to cite specific, local examples. And please ensure your letter not only mentions our problems, but specifies and calls for a responsible, balanced, revenue-reform solution.

A. Illinois' revenue problems are more dire and complex than at any time in the past 70 years – and families are suffering for it.

- We're suffering from both a national recession and an outdated state-revenue system that can't keep-up with our most basic needs in education, health and human services.
- Illinois already has slashed more than \$1 billion from critical programs, such as preschool, mental health and after-school services. And delays in state payments are forcing important programs to curtail services or close entirely.
- Now, critical programs face more than \$2 billion in additional budget cuts that threaten further harm to kids and families at the very time they need help most.
- It's impossible to cut our way out of this mess. Even if we eliminated all spending on public education – from preschools to elementary and high schools to community colleges and public universities – we wouldn't be able to close a revenue gap as big as the \$13 billion hole we face.

B. We need a balanced, responsible approach to our budget problems: A solution must include raising more adequate revenue for vital public services.

- An income tax increase is necessary to reduce the budget cuts we face. And the income tax reflects families' ability to pay, so funding can be raised fairly.
- A balanced approach would help modernize our revenue system – such as updating our sales-tax base to include some of the services that are a growing foundation of our current economy.
- Greater use of tax credits and exemptions can help us raise necessary resources in a way that's fair to families, targeting help to low- and middle-income families, property-owners and seniors.
- More than 30 other states already have raised general taxes, as part of a balanced solution to their own revenue problems.

C. Jobs and economic recovery are at stake.

- State budget cuts are eliminating thousands and thousands of jobs – from teachers to social-service providers.
- Many workers who depend upon state services – such as child care help, while mom and dad are on the job – are losing their work supports due to cuts.
- Leading economists agree that slashing vital public services is more harmful than a tax increase to economic-recovery efforts.
- We need to shore-up and strengthen – not destroy – the public services that families need to get back on their feet and prosper.

D. No more excuses: Kids and families need policymakers to act today to approve a full-year state budget with adequate resources.

- We've already begun the reforms that many people call important – from public pensions to campaign finance to state ethics reforms. But we haven't done anything about raising necessary, new revenues.
- The more that state leaders cut, borrow and delay, the worse problems become for communities that are watching vital services cut back and shut down.
- The Illinois state Senate and a House committee wisely approved a revenue-reform package last spring, called House Bill 174. We applaud those efforts, which show we can do better for kids and families.
- Kids, families and communities can't wait any longer for our elected leaders to help us. We need state leaders to step-up and do the right thing by approving a revenue framework like that of HB174.
- Nothing less than that – no six-month budget, no delays until after elections – will do.

For more information or for any assistance with writing your letter or submitting it for publication, please contact: Joan Vitale (jvitale@voices4kids.org or 312-516-5555).

04.12.10