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Voices for Illinois Children June Newsletter

From Voices President Tasha Green Cruzat

The clock has hit midnight, we are into June, and there is no complete state budget. If nothing happens in the next 30 days, Illinois will begin an unprecedented third year without a full state budget. The path towards avoiding that situation is now more difficult with the constitutional requirement that for any legislation to become effective immediately it will need approval by three-fifths of the members in each chamber rather than a simple majority.

Going a third year without a budget is unacceptable. The state already has a backlog of bills totaling \$14.5 billion. Illinois Comptroller Susanna Mendoza has said by the end of June the bill backlog could total \$16-17 billion dollars. That's just the bills themselves. Her office projects the state will owe at least \$800 million in late payment interest by the end of the fiscal year.

Vital human services and higher education have gone unfunded since the last stopgap funding measure expired at the end of 2016. As Voices' Policy Analyst John Gordon noted earlier this month in his review of [higher education funding](#), the impact of the last two years of funding cuts have resulted in university staff cuts, furlough days, and the elimination of degree programs. Combined with a failure to adequately fund the state's Monetary Award Program for college grants to low- and moderate-income families, enrollment is down significantly at some of our state universities and more high school graduates are headed out of state for college.

Social service providers waiting months to get paid have decided staff cuts or shutting down a program altogether are their only viable options. It's an option that leaves thousands of our most vulnerable citizens either without services or anxious that before long the service they depend on for

treatment will be gone. In a March survey of social service providers, United Way of Illinois found three months after the end of the last stopgap budget nearly half of the agencies surveyed had reduced the number of clients they served. Most prevalent were those providers handling mental health services, youth development, and job training.

This is no way to run a state. We are turning our backs on people looking to make a better life for themselves. Investors lack confidence in our state. The state's credit rating has plummeted. The bill backlog continues to mount. This madness needs to stop.

There have been members of the General Assembly with the courage to vote for the necessary revenue to run the state and pay our bills. Yet, that courage has fallen short of the votes necessary to pass revenue bills. It's time for other members of the legislature to muster the courage to help those in need.

Meantime, the clock is also ticking in Washington where the U.S. Senate is working on a health care reform bill. If the bill that emerges from the U.S. Senate resembles the version of the American Health Care Act passed by the U.S. House, it could increase the number of uninsured nationally by 23 million and force millions of people in the individual market to pay more for health care. It will also have a significant impact on the approximately 3.1 million people enrolled in Illinois' Medicaid program. Earlier this month, Policy Analyst Mayumi Grigsby reviewed what the [state's Medicaid program](#) means for the nearly 1.7 million women and girls enrolled in it...and the potential cutback or elimination of services under the proposed health care reform.

Other legislative items

When the Illinois House adjourned last night, until the call of the Speaker, two of the items left on the calendar were HB 2771 and HB 3691. Both bills need the chamber's approval of amendments adopted by the House. HB 2771 creates the Healthy Workplace Act in Illinois and would allow an employee to accrue up to forty hours of paid sick leave a year. Read Militza Pagan's [fact sheet](#) on the benefits it provides to working children and families. HB 3691 creates a [Children's Savings Account](#) program in Illinois.

Kids Count

KIDS COUNT is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that analyzes data from the U.S. Census Bureau and elsewhere showing the well-being of children in the United States. Voices for Illinois Children is proud to be part of the KIDS COUNT network of state-level organizations funded by the Casey Foundation.

As a partner in the KIDS COUNT program, Voices collects additional state and local data, analyzes the data along with statistics collected by the Casey Foundation, and produces publications on the trends affecting child and family well-being in Illinois. This month, the Casey Foundation will release its 2017 KIDS COUNT Report. Keep an eye on our website for updates from Voices' KIDS COUNT Manager Anna Rowan. Until then, you can look at Illinois data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#).

Breakfast After the Bell

In 2014, the Illinois child poverty rate was 20.2%. In many of those children's households, families struggle to put enough food on the table. Last year, the Illinois legislature approved a bill to ensure more children start the school day with a healthy breakfast. It requires schools with 70% or more of the student population eligible for free or reduced-price meals to serve breakfast as part of the school day. The program, "Breakfast After the Bell", takes effect in the 2017-2018 school year.

[Rise and Shine Illinois](#) has produced the [Playbook: Breakfast After the Bell Implementation Tool Kit](#) that provides resources for schools in implementing the breakfast program. The program has academic as well as health benefits. You can view how the program has worked at some central Illinois schools at <http://bit.ly/2ptA1WX>.

Voices' Anniversary Benefit

We are just days away from our 30th Anniversary Celebration! If you have not already purchased your ticket to Voices for Illinois Children's Anniversary Benefit, you can do so at Voices2017.gesture.com.

Along with recognizing Voices accomplishments in the last three decades, we will be honoring a group of individuals whose unwavering commitment to children: Merri Dee, a philanthropist and former WGN-TV Anchor; Miriam and George Kelm, Voices Board Member and Founding Board Member; and Terry Mazany, the President and Chief Executive of The Chicago Community Trust.

If you have any further questions, please contact Jeannette Mihalek, Voices Director of Development at jmihalek@voices4kids.org or (312) 516-5552.



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