“The African-American Family Commission is a statewide Commission appointed by the governor to advocate for and develop policies, plans, and programs for children and families by promoting the preservation of families in order to strengthen African-American communities throughout the state of Illinois.”
Children are only as healthy and as strong as their families and the communities they live in. The African-American Family Commission is dedicated to ensuring that Illinois’s public policies and governmental agencies help families and communities to develop the human and social capital necessary to provide a supportive and nurturing environment essential to the healthy growth and development of children.

The wide range of challenges facing African-American children and families, including disparities in health, education, earnings, child welfare, and criminal justice, requires a new approach to human and social capital development. The relationship between consumers, providers, and state agencies must be built on trust and respect. In FY’04, the African-American Family Commission continued to work toward building a network of internal and external partners committed to improving the lives of people of color throughout the state of Illinois.

It is this objective that mobilized the commission to actively develop, introduce, and support legislation to expand its focus and scope. This will be accomplished in the coming fiscal year (FY’05) as the commission transitions from an entity created by executive order to one reconstituted and recreated by legislation as the Illinois African-American Family Commission.

Over the next several years, the Illinois African-American Family Commission will focus more on research initiatives and programs that enhance the skills and strengthen the knowledge base of public policymakers, advocates, and families, and facilitate intergovernmental relationships to improve the economic, educational, health, and social well-being of African American families in Illinois. Our children deserve to live in safe communities free of violence. They are entitled to receive quality health care and the best education possible. When families and government work together on behalf of children, everyone wins.
Executive Summary

The African-American Family Commission, created in 1994, is a statewide Commission appointed by the governor to advocate for and help develop policies, plans, and programs that promote family preservation and strengthen African-American communities in Illinois. Commission members are appointed by the governor for a two-year term. They represent a broad cross-section of communities and neighborhoods and a wide range of educational, business, religious, human service, and related professions. The Commission operated on revenues of $490,427 for Fiscal Year 2004, the majority of which originated with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. Highlights of its work in 2004 follow.

The Commission published The Social and Economic Profile of African-Americans in Illinois, a groundbreaking work documenting the status of African-Americans relative to education, employment, income, housing, health, child welfare, and criminal justice. African-Americans in Illinois fare worse than the general population in most of those realms. In 2000, for example, 15% of African-Americans in Illinois were unemployed compared with 6% of the state’s population overall. Earnings from work were also lower. The median household income of African-Americans was $10,000 less than the state average in 2000. The profile also documented the overrepresentation of African-Americans in the child welfare and adult and juvenile corrections systems. African-Americans, for example, made up 15% of the state population but nearly two-thirds of the adult inmate population in 2000. Similarly, African-American children made up less than 20% of the state’s population in 2000, but more than 70% of children in foster care.

This overrepresentation in the foster care system prompted the Commission to look more carefully at kinship care and subsidized guardianship in the state. Several presenters at a July 2003 conference on children and families organized by the Commission reviewed the emerging research on these approaches to foster care. A demonstration program was conducted to test the viability of subsidized guardianship. Subsidized guardianship provides funding to families, often grandparents, who take in their relative children when parents are unable to care for them. The Commission was instrumental in ensuring that the demonstration was culturally sensitive to the African-American community. Results are promising, and presenters suggested that subsidized guardianship should be considered as a new permanency option.

The Commission also assembled an impressive group of policymakers, researchers, advocates, and other stakeholders at the April 2004 State of the African-American Family Symposium. The topics focused on criminal justice, with a specific emphasis on re-entry into the community of the formerly incarcerated; the challenges of ensuring health equity for African-Americans in Illinois; and community development and neighborhood destabilization and its effect on the African-American family. Panelists, for example, discussed the struggles for communities and the formerly incarcerated as they leave prison and return home. Others discussed innovative ways to improve the health of African-Americans and improve the health systems serving them. Still others discussed the rising issue of gentrification as public housing is razed and replaced with mixed-income communities.

Another area of special concern, given its long-term implications for the African-American community, is the high school dropout rate. The Commission conducted a pilot study of high school dropouts in Chicago, looking specifically at the community and family characteristics that might contribute to higher dropout rates. Findings show that dropout rates are highest in impoverished communities, those with more single-mother households, lower income levels, and whose residents themselves were high school dropouts. The findings point to the importance for policymakers of focusing on the classic socioeconomic markers, especially a household’s education levels and economic standing, as well as marital stability, to address the high and persistent dropout rates among some Chicago high schools.

An integral aspect of the Commission’s mission is to stay abreast of legislation that will affect the Af-
frican-American family. The legislative committee of the Commission reviewed numerous public policies and legislation in 2004 to assess their impact on the African-American community. Based on feedback from community organizations, consumers, elected officials, providers, and other stakeholders, the committee recommended actions that the Commission should take surrounding specific legislation.

The Commission also takes its findings and concerns directly to the Illinois House and Senate. Commission staff testified before the House and Senate in 2004. Testimony was given before the Illinois House Juvenile Justice Committee in favor of legislation, such as HB 1091, that automatically expunges the records of youth who committed crimes as juveniles. Under current law, youth may petition to have their records expunged, but it is not automatic. This is a growing issue for many African-American families as the juvenile inmate population in Illinois grew from 1,278 in 1991 to 2,214 in 1999, a 73% increase. Of these, 57% are African-American. The stigma of a prison record, it was argued, often compounds the already difficult circumstances of many of these youth as they struggle to regain a foothold in society.

Many in the corrections population have struggled in school. A pilot study by the Commission found that the majority of detainees in the Cook County Jail in 2003 had low levels of education. In fact, nearly 70% had dropped out of high school. Executive Director, Terry A. Solomon, reported in her testimony before the Illinois Senate Education Committee the Commission’s concern that current expulsion and suspension rules in the public schools are escalating the dropout problem. The Commission recommended that the State Board of Education report annually the number of children by age, race, and education level who re-enroll in school after being suspended or expelled; create community-based services to help parents re-enroll their children; create a taskforce to review suspension and expulsion policies; and increase the mandatory age for a youth to continue attending school from the current age 16 to age 18.

Finally, despite the fact that the Commission is primarily an advocacy group, its Child Watch Helpline received calls from 43 families in the course of 2004. Many needed shelter, help with rent, employment assistance, parenting assistance, and help with child welfare cases. Clearly, the need for community services and programs to strengthen and support families persists.
The African-American Family Commission is a statewide Commission established by Executive Order Number Seven on October 3, 1994. The Commission is a collaborative effort between government, child welfare agencies, community-based organizations, families, and leaders from the public and private sectors and the community dedicated to preserving the well-being of families. The Commission engages in advocacy, institution building, and policy development, acting as a standard and value bearer.

The Commission advocates a holistic approach to identify and redress public policies that destabilize African-American families and communities.

**Commissioners**
Commission members are appointed by the governor for a two-year term, and 85% of members are residents of Cook County. They represent a broad cross-section of communities and neighborhoods and a wide range of educational, business, religious, human service, and related professions. There are 30 Commissioners.

**Committees**
The committee structure of the Commission is as follows:
- Communications and Public Relations
- Finance and Personnel
- Child Welfare
- Criminal Justice
- Health/Mental Health
- Education
- Economic Development
- Legislative
- Executive Committee

**(Committee Chairs and Officers)**

**Offices**
The Commission’s main office is located in Chicago, with a satellite office in Springfield.

**Staff**
The staff employed by the Commission includes:
- Executive Director
- Deputy Director of Operations
- Legislative Liaison
- Research Specialist
- Community Outreach Specialist
- Operations Coordinator
- Executive Assistant
- Receptionist

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services provides additional staff services and resources to the Commission.

**During FY 2004, executive committee and full Commission meetings were held as follows:**

**Executive Committee Meetings**
- September 10, 2003  Chicago, IL
- November 5, 2003  Springfield, IL
- January 21, 2004  Chicago, IL
- May 12, 2004  Springfield, IL

**Commission Meetings**
- October 20, 2003  Chicago, IL
- January 21, 2004  Springfield, IL
- March 9, 2004  Chicago, IL
- June 18-19, 2004  Mt. Vernon, IL
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROFILE OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN ILLINOIS

In 2004, the African-American Family Commission published a compilation of data on African-Americans, *The Social and Economic Profile of African-Americans in Illinois*. This profile provides an overview of the well-being of African-Americans in key domains, including education, employment and income, poverty, housing, health, child welfare, and criminal justice. The geographical areas covered encompass the state of Illinois and select Illinois counties (those with the largest African-American populations). The profile serves to inform stakeholders about some of the challenges that African-Americans in Illinois face.

The tables and charts that appear in the profile tell a familiar story. Since settling in Illinois in large numbers, African-Americans have progressed in many areas of life. Despite this progress, they continue to lag behind other racial groups on key indicators of health and well-being. Selected facts from the profile follow:

❖ In 2000, the percentage of African-Americans with a high school diploma or higher (73%) was below that of the Illinois population as a whole (81.4%). The percentage of African-Americans with a bachelor’s degree or higher (14.7%) was also below that of the total Illinois population (26.1%).

❖ Because of low levels of education and other factors, African-Americans in Illinois faced a high unemployment rate of 15% compared with 6% for the total Illinois population in 2000. In fact, the unemployment rate for African-American males (17%) was nearly three times the unemployment rate for the total Illinois population in 2000.

❖ African-Americans who had secured employment earned less than members of other racial groups. The median household income of African-Americans was $10,000 below the state average in 2000.

❖ Even greater disparities existed in child welfare and criminal justice. African-American children made up less than 20% of the total child population in Illinois in 2000, but constituted more than 70% of the children in foster care.

❖ African-Americans made up just 15% of the total population in Illinois in 2000, but constituted nearly two-thirds of the adult inmate population.

❖ The disparities among races in child welfare and criminal justice may be symptomatic of the more fundamental problem of poverty. In 1999, nearly a quarter of African-American families and a slightly higher percentage of African-American individuals were below the poverty level in Illinois.

❖ Although the leading causes of death among African-Americans were about the same as those of the general population in Illinois, African-Americans experienced higher mortality rates. African-Americans had higher mortality rates overall and more deaths from cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke than other racial groups in Illinois in 2000. Moreover, they suffered greater risks for obesity and smoking-related deaths in 2001 and deaths from HIV/AIDS in 2002.
African-Americans in Illinois often face stark disparities in income, health, housing, and in the effects of crime on their lives and in their communities. The “State of the African-American Family Symposium,” held on April 6, 2004, was convened by the African-American Family Commission and cosponsored by the African-American Family Research Institute; the Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago; and the Institute for Research on Race & Public Policy of the University of Illinois at Chicago to assess the state of the African-American family and community. The symposium brought together advocates, consumers, practitioners, policymakers, and researchers from across the state to discuss three topics: criminal justice, with a specific focus on re-entry into the community of the formerly incarcerated; the challenges of ensuring health equity for African-Americans in Illinois; and community development and neighborhood destabilization and its effect on the African-American family.

Incarceration and Re-entry into Communities of the Formerly Incarcerated

In 2000, 16% of the African-American male workforce in Illinois had a felony conviction, and nearly one in three adult African-American men in Chicago had a felony conviction. These startling facts both underscore the profound challenges facing families and communities and expose an underlying structural racism, as alluded to by the keynote speaker, Illinois Senate President Emil Jones, Jr., in his comments on racial profiling and by Dr. Creasie Finney Hairston, dean of the Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago, in her expression of discomfort in seeing a predominantly African-American prison population in a recent tour of a correctional facility. The facts also bring home the very real issue of returning ex-offenders. Of those who go to prison, 90% eventually are released, and often they return to the communities they called home before imprisonment. Preparing the formerly incarcerated to return to their communities, through employment and other supports, and preparing the communities to receive these men and women were among the topics discussed by the panelists.

The panelists discussed some of the re-entry programs available for these men and (increasingly) women, but also noted the very real shortage of funding for programs. Without support, the men and women often rely on already overtaxed families, and unsurprisingly, many return to the old ways of life and are re-arrested. Among the programs discussed that support the formerly incarcerated was the Safer Foundation, which aids about 1,500 formerly incarcerated in any given year throughout the state. Likewise, the Department of Corrections offers programs, including the Illinois Going Home program, which targets young men returning to North Lawndale, and the Transitional Job Network. Programs for juvenile offenders and those with substance use issues are also available. However, a significantly higher level of resources must be committed in response to increasing need.

Health Equity

African-Americans die at much higher rates in Illinois than other racial-ethnic groups, and they die of diseases that are, for the most part, preventable. Obesity and asthma are especially high in the Chicago area, with asthma rates in some communities four times higher than those in the nation as a whole. Income, racism, and discrimination help account for much of this disparity, compounded by distrust in the African-American community of health research. Yet without data and research, many panelists noted, the inequities in the care and health of African-Americans are unlikely to improve. The challenge involved in attaining population-based health statistics, owing to privacy and other issues, makes it difficult to argue the need for more money among specific populations and com-
munities. As the director of the Illinois Department of Public Health noted, state-level solutions and policies rarely translate to communities without a sense of the communities’ unique characteristics.

Often what black men talk about when they talk about health is having a job. This points to the larger issue, addressed by all the panelists, of the importance of viewing health in a more holistic way. Health is not an isolated event; it is interconnected with all other aspects of life. Project Brotherhood a Black Men’s Clinic, sponsored by the Illinois Department of Public Health, is an example of placing health in the larger realm of issues important to black men, including employment and family responsibilities.

Recommended solutions to the problems of health disparity included more emphasis on cultural competence and collaboration in practice, better dissemination of findings, a more comprehensive system of care, broader health insurance coverage, early education, and a clearer focus on community-level solutions. Stronger affirmative action policies to ensure the training of more African-American doctors would help in addressing the reluctance among African-Americans to seek health care. A clean indoor air act would go far in helping youth with asthma. The Health Care Justice Act in Illinois calls for a plan to achieve affordable and accessible health care by 2007, a positive step. In the end, the panelists urged an increase in advocates to ensure that African-American health inequities are narrowed and the health of the community is enhanced.

Gentrification and Public Housing
As Chicago embarks on a radical plan to raze high-rise public housing, a transformation is underway in many communities. Under the city’s plan, the razed public housing is to be replaced with mixed income communities. The best laid plans, however, often have unforeseen consequences. These consequences are perhaps no more evident than in the gentrifying neighborhood of Bronzeville on Chicago’s near south side. The public housing residents of Bronzeville are being relocated while the area homes are renovated and sold to higher-income families. The question on the minds of the panelists was, Where are these poor families going? The price of most available replacement housing begins at $159,000. Although the new mixed income communities set aside a proportion of the housing for displaced public housing families, the strict requirements often exclude a majority of former public housing residents. As a result, communities such as South Shore and Harvey are experiencing an influx of residents, which often causes doubling up in homes and puts pressure on community services and supports. Beyond the immediate disruption that accompanies a move is a disruption of personal networks of support, from babysitters to rides to the grocery store. All these disruptions leave many already vulnerable families even more fragile. Community-building nonprofit organizations, the panelists argued, can play a significant role in addressing the issues arising from dislocation, and planning committees must additionally play a strong role before the dislocation occurs.

In closing the day’s proceedings, directors of four Illinois government departments—the Department of Employment Security (IDES), the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Department of Public Aid (DPA), and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)—reflected on their roles in aiding and supporting African-American families.

Director Brenda Russell of IDES reported on the agency’s role in helping the formerly incarcerated, and advocated removing the red tape of government bureaucracy to make seeking help easier for families. Director Bryan Samuels of DCFS discussed the agency’s efforts to support youth who have experienced life in both foster care and juvenile justice systems, and to continue to support youth as they age out of care. Bureau Chief Granada Williams of DCEO reported on the governor’s economic development plan, “Opportunity Returns,” which stresses regional economic development plans. Director Barry Maram of DPA noted the important link between health and employment, and the governor’s efforts to expand Medicaid to a larger group of families.
In July 2003, the African-American Family Commission, the Jane Addams College of Social Work of the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the Children and Family Research Center of the School of Social Work of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, hosted a forum on children and families. Thirty-seven representatives of state agencies, local colleges, and community-based organizations attended the invitation-only forum to discuss better ways for experts from public policy, child welfare, and research to support children and families. Topics of the presentations encompassed children, family and community contexts, the value and legal risks of permanence, the value of kinship care, reunification, and the well-being of children in care. The findings of the research presented at the forum are summarized below.

Mark Testa, Robert Hill, and Jim Gleeson provided an overview of subsidized guardianship. They indicated that the 2000 U. S. Census revealed that six million children under the age of 18, or 1 in 12, live in a household headed by the child’s grandparent or relative. Black children are four to five times more likely to live with kin than white children. Blacks have a higher rate of kinship care than any other ethnic group, and this rate continues to increase. Kinship care continues to grow most dramatically among families with the least financial resources and the highest social service needs.

Mark Testa spoke on the topic of value and legal risks of permanence. He reported that a demonstration project to evaluate the effect of subsidized guardianship as a permanency option randomly assigned approximately 1,500 children in foster care for two years or more to an experimental (guardianship) or a control (adoption) group. The African-American Family Commission was instrumental in assuring the cultural sensitivity of the project by convening an advisory committee to assist in the research design. Results show that the availability of guardianship boosted the legal permanency rate. Almost 80% of the children assigned to the experimental group moved into a legally permanent home. Indeed, guardianship appears to be as stable as adoption. Incidence of children returning to the child welfare system was low, and two-thirds of those who did return did so because of the incapacity or death of caregivers. It is also encouraging that children in adoption and guardianship are nearly identical in terms of their well-being.

Hill discussed the value of permanence, which indicates a child’s degree of stability, safety, and well-being. He indicated that the demonstration project results showed little or no difference between the subsidized guardianship and adoptive experience. Ninety percent of children in adoptive homes felt that they were part of the current family, as did 90% of children in subsidized guardian homes. Ninety percent of the children sampled also indicated that they wanted to stay in their current home. Moreover, 90% of children in both subsidized and adoptive homes felt happy, and 80% of children in both homes felt safe. In addition, 90% of children in both homes felt that the caregivers would protect them from harm. Notwithstanding, children who lived with kin tended to be more stable than children who lived with non-kin.

Gleeson discussed kinship care. He indicated that although some kinship caregivers report social, psychological, physical, and economic loss, they also report high levels of satisfaction and meaning from parenting. Children placed with kin have lower levels of behavioral and emotional problems compared with children placed with non-relatives. However, children placed with relatives display higher rates of behavioral and emotional problems than children in the general population.

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Mary Ann Hartnett, Christina Bruhn, and Yolando Green examined the well-being of children in care. They indicated that fewer relative-care cases achieved a rating of “substantially achieved” on indicators of children’s psychological and physical health than other placement types. Although African-American children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system, fewer African-American children than white or Hispanic
children have a mental health diagnosis. Reports of diagnosed behavior problems and clinical behavior problems vary by placement type, with most reports coming from caregivers at residential homes, followed by specialized care, traditional care, and relative care.

Dorothy Roberts (Northwestern University, School of Law) spoke on the topic of reunification. She indicated that kinship care may be successful, but reunification continues to face challenges. African-American children experience reunification at lower rates than children of other cultures. Despite large increases in the rate of adoption, the rate of reunification has drastically declined. Policy may affect the difference in the rate of adoption and reunification. For example, the Adoption and Safe Families Act encourages states to expedite permanencies, including adoptions.

In conclusion, Hill stated that his data supported the conclusion that subsidized guardianship should be adopted as a new permanency option. Dorothy Roberts made recommendations for improving reunification, including using a different approach to welfare reform, increasing family preservation programs, changing incentives for performance contracting, encouraging reunification, and adding incentives for reunification.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AS A FACTOR IN CHICAGO'S HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT PROBLEM

Well-being depends on one’s physical and psychological state, cognitive functioning, and social and economic standing. The substantial high school dropout rate in Chicago, and in other parts of the country, suggests that one aspect of youth well-being—cognitive functioning, as defined by intellectual or school readiness—is suffering. In 2000, the dropout rate in Chicago (15.2%) was more than twice the rate for the state of Illinois (6.2%) and three times the national average (4.8%).

Definitions for dropouts vary among states, districts, and schools within the same district; counts of dropouts are sometimes systematically underreported; and estimates of dropouts may be inaccurate and misleading. Notwithstanding, several authorities place national, state, and local dropout rates at unacceptably high levels. Characteristics of students, features of the school, and factors external to the school have been found to contribute to the dropout problem.

Method

In June 2004, the African-American Family Commission conducted a pilot study on the high school dropout problem in Chicago. The study compared indicators of family background among 26 Chicago public high schools, selected because they either had exceptionally high or low dropout rates. Data for the study were from the 2003 School Report Card and the 2000 U.S. Census, aggregated to the community level. The study used single-factor ANOVAs to determine whether differences in the family background of students were reliable.

Results

The study found significant differences in school dropout rates along demographic and social dimensions of family and community background. Schools with low dropout rates were located in communities with more whites, whereas schools with high dropout rates were situated in communities with more African-Americans. Moreover, the communities of schools with high dropout rates had fewer married couples; more frequent marital separation; more female-headed households;
and more adults who had dropped out themselves. As much previous research has suggested, differences in school dropout rates were most evident along economic dimensions. Figures 1–3 show that schools with high dropout rates belonged to communities with lower family incomes, and with more of its members living in poverty. Similarly, schools with high dropout rates belonged to communities where more families received public assistance or Supplemental Security Income or were headed by a single female living in poverty.

**Conclusion**

Differences in the educational attainment and economic standing of family members should receive particular attention from policymakers and other concerned citizens intent on developing policy-driven and programmatic solutions to close the gap between students dropping out of high school and those completing their education. Efforts should also be made to strengthen and preserve marital unions.

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**Figure 1. Income Level in Communities by Dropout Rates**

![Figure 1. Income Level in Communities by Dropout Rates](image_url)
**Figure 2. Poverty Levels in Communities by Dropout Rates**

![Bar chart showing poverty levels in communities by dropout rates.](chart1)

**Figure 3. Source of Income in Communities by Dropout Rate**

![Bar chart showing sources of income in communities by dropout rates.](chart2)
Throughout the fiscal year, the legislative committee of the African-American Family Commission reviewed public policies and legislation to assess their impact on the African-American community. The Commission received input from consumers, providers, and other stakeholders. Based on the feedback received, the legislative committee recommended action to be undertaken by the full Commission.

The following section summarizes selected legislation introduced during the 94th General Assembly legislative session and monitored by the Commission.

**House Bill 2268/Senate Bill 2581**
Creates the Health Care Justice Act. Provides that the State of Illinois shall implement a health care plan that provides access to a full range of preventive, acute, and long-term health care services. Establishes the Bipartisan Health Care Reform Commission with members appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders. Provides for public hearings and a report by the Commission. Requires a preliminary report by February 1, 2005 and a final report by February 1, 2006. Effective immediately. Status: Public Act 93-0973 8/20/04

**House Bill 3963**
Amends the Inclusion of Women and Minorities in Clinical Research Act. Requires that 20% of the participants in projects of clinical research conducted by certain qualified public, private, or not-for-profit agencies, or individuals that receive state funding must be African-Americans. Defines “minority group” as a group that is a readily identifiable subset of the U.S. population that is distinguished by either racial, ethnic, or cultural heritage, and identifies certain racial and ethnic categories as included within that definition. Status: Referred to Senate Rules Committee

**House Bill 4306**
Amends the Children and Family Services Act. Provides that every child placed under the act shall be evaluated for the purpose of mental illness diagnosis. Provides that every child with a diagnosis of mental illness shall receive the necessary mental health services. Provides that the department shall prepare an assessment of each mental health community service network and complete all required individual and network assessments by January 1, 2006. Effective immediately. Status: Re-referred to House Rules Committee

**House Bill 4566**
Amends the Juvenile Court Act of 1987. Provides that a minor who is eligible to have his or her juvenile records expunged shall at the time of sentencing or dismissal of the case be informed by the judge of his or her right to expungement and shall be provided an expungement information packet by the clerk of the circuit court. Provides that if an objection to expungement is filed within 90 days of the notice of expungement, a hearing shall be set on the objections. Status: Public Act 93-0912 8/12/04

**House Bill 4610**
Amends the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 and the Unified Code of Corrections. Provides that persons under 18 years of age (rather than under 17 years of age) who commit offenses are subject to the proceedings under the act for delinquent minors. Status: Re-referred to Senate Rules Committee

**House Bill 4650**
Amends the Criminal Code of 1961. Provides that whenever, under any agreement, either written or verbal, a landlord or his or her agent charges a tenant for any water, gas, or electrical service and the tenant pays the landlord for the utility service and the landlord or his or her agent does not pay the utility company for the service and the utility company terminates service and, as a result of the termination of utility service, the landlord knows or reasonably should know that the health or safety of the tenant is endangered, the landlord is guilty of the offense of criminal housing management. Status: House Lost 45-69-03

**House Bill 4831**
Requires the Department of Human Services to establish a program to award grants to area projects to plan, establish, operate, coordinate, and evaluate community services programs. Requires the department to establish eligibility requirements for grants. Sets forth
procedures for grant awards. Effective immediately. Status: Public Act 93-0730 7/14/04

**House Bill 4856**
Amends the Tenant Utility Payment Disclosure Act. Requires a landlord to provide to the prospective tenant a separate statement detailing any utility services to be paid for by the landlord. Provides that failure of the landlord to provide the required statement does not invalidate the lease, but gives rise to a rebuttable presumption of the landlord’s bad faith in any action against the landlord based in whole or in part on the landlord’s failure to provide utility services. Status: Public Act 93-0994 8/23/04

**House Bill 6811**
Provides that a person at least 17 years of age at the time of the commission of the offense, and who is subsequently convicted of the offense of first degree murder against a person under 18 years of age, must register as a sex offender for natural life. Eliminates the provision that the offense had to have been committed on or after January 1, 1986. Also provides that a person required to register as a sex offender who intends (rather than desires) to establish a residence or employment outside the State of Illinois must inform the law enforcement agency with which he or she last registered of his or her out-of-state residence or employment. Status: Public Act 93-0977 8/20/04

**House Bill 7038**
Amends the Department of Human Services Act and the Department of Public Health Powers and Duties Law of the Civil Administrative Code of Illinois. Requires the Department of Human Services and the Department of Public Health to each submit a report to the General Assembly concerning funding targeted to affect teen birth rates. Sets forth the requirements for the report. Effective immediately. Status: Re-referred to the Senate Rules Committee

**Senate Bill 2115**
Amends the School Code. Allows a school or school district to deny enrollment to a student 16 years of age or older for one semester for failure to meet minimum academic or attendance standards if certain conditions are met. Requires a district to identify, track, and report the educational progress and outcomes of re-enrolled students (defined as dropouts who have re-enrolled full-time) as a subset of the district’s required reporting on all enrollments. Provides that a re-enrolled student who again drops out must not be counted again against a district’s dropout rate performance measure. Requires the state Board of Education to set performance standards for programs serving re-enrolled students. Effective immediately. Status: Public Act 93-0803 7/23/04

**Senate Bill 2448**
Amends the Children and Family Services Act. Requires the Department to (i) train all child protective investigators concerning the statutory and constitutional rights of individuals subject to investigation for child abuse and neglect and (ii) require all child protective investigators to inform individuals subject to a child-abuse and neglect investigation concerning the specific complaints or allegations made against the individual. Status: Public Act 93-0733 7/14/04

**Senate Bill 2583**
Amends the Abandoned Newborn Infant Protection Act. Provides for relinquishment of a newborn infant to a police station (in addition to a hospital, fire station, or emergency medical facility). Provides that “police station” means a municipal police station or a county sheriff’s office. Provides that a police station to which a newborn infant is relinquished must arrange for the transportation of the infant to the nearest hospital as soon as transportation can be arranged. Effective immediately. Status: Public Act 93-0820 7/27/04

**Senate Bill 2742**
Amends the Department of Public Health Powers and Duties Law of the Civil Administrative Code of Illinois. Provides that, subject to appropriation, the Department of Public Health shall establish a childhood obesity prevention program designed to prevent and reduce the incidence and prevalence of obesity in children and adolescents, especially among populations with high rates of obesity and obesity-related health complications. Requires the department to periodically collect and analyze information from certain sources in order to (i) determine the prevalence of childhood obesity in the state and (ii) evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Provides that the Director of Public Health may directly administer the program, and au-
thorizes the department, subject to appropriation, to make grants for community-based projects targeted at populations at high risk for childhood obesity. Effective immediately. Status: Re-referred to Senate Rules Committee

**Senate Bill 2940**
Amends the School Code and the Illinois Health Statistics Act. Provides that health examinations shall include the collection of data relating to obesity, including, at a minimum, date of birth, gender, height, weight, blood pressure, and date of exam. Provides that the Department of Public Health shall collect and maintain health data on the extent, nature, and impact of obesity. Provides that the department may collect health data from local schools and the State Board of Education relating to obesity on health examination forms. Provides that the data collected by the department shall be de-identified and aggregated to prevent disclosure of personal identifying information. Status: Senate Bill 2918

Amends the School Code. Increases the compulsory school age from 16 to 17 years of age, with exceptions. Provides that certain provisions that apply to truant officers apply to the regional superintendent of schools or his or her designee in a school district that does not have a truant officer. Makes changes concerning the compliance procedure for persons who fail to send a child to school. Allows certain students to enroll in graduation incentives programs. Lists programs that qualify as graduation incentives programs. Provides for reimbursement and funding for programs. Status: Senate Bill 2988

Creates the Residential Tenants’ Right to Repair Act. Provides that, if a repair is required under a residential lease agreement or required under a law, rule, or ordinance, and the reasonable cost of the repair does not exceed the lesser of $500 or one-half of the monthly rent, the tenant may notify the landlord in writing of the tenant’s intention to have the repair made at the landlord’s expense. Provides that, if the landlord fails to make the repair within 14 days or more promptly in an emergency, the tenant may have the repair made and, after submitting a paid bill to the landlord, deduct from his or her rent the amount of the bill, subject to specified limitations. Status: Public Act 93-0891 8/09/04

**Senate Bill 3007**
Amends the Criminal Identification Act. Provides that the sealing of the arrest and conviction records of the Department of State Police, the arresting authority, and the clerk of the circuit court is available to a person charged with, placed on supervision for, and convicted of a misdemeanor or Class 4 felony violation for prostitution, a misdemeanor or Class 4 felony possession violation of the Illinois Controlled Substances Act, or the Cannabis Control Act. Provides that the Illinois Department of Corrections, in cooperation with the Illinois Department of Employment Security, shall conduct a blind study utilizing a random sample of those who apply for the sealing of their criminal records under Public Act 93-211 relating to their employment history. Provides that the study shall be delivered to the chairpersons of the House and Senate judiciary committees no later than September 1, 2006. Status: Senate Bill 3208

Creates the Illinois African-American Family Commission Act. Establishes a 15-member Illinois African-American Family Commission to guide the efforts of and collaborate with the Department on Aging, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Public Aid, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Transportation, and others to improve and expand existing human services and educational and community development programs for African-Americans in the state. Provides that the Commission shall be funded through appropriations made for its purposes to these collaborating state departments. Sets forth guidelines for appointment and term length of Commission members. Provides that the Commission shall annually report to the governor and the General Assembly on the Commission’s progress toward its goals and objectives. Effective immediately. Status: Senate Bill 3007

Amends the School Code and the Illinois Health Statistics Act. Provides that health examinations shall include the collection of data relating to obesity, including, at a minimum, date of birth, gender, height, weight, blood pressure, and date of exam. Provides that the Department of Public Health shall collect and maintain health data on the extent, nature, and impact of obesity. Provides that the department may collect health data from local schools and the State Board of Education relating to obesity on health examination forms. Provides that the data collected by the department shall be de-identified and aggregated to prevent disclosure of personal identifying information. Status: Public Act 93-0966 8/20/04

Amends the School Code. Increases the compulsory school age from 16 to 17 years of age, with exceptions. Provides that certain provisions that apply to truant officers apply to the regional superintendent of schools or his or her designee in a school district that does not have a truant officer. Makes changes concerning the compliance procedure for persons who fail to send a child to school. Allows certain students to enroll in graduation incentives programs. Lists programs that qualify as graduation incentives programs. Provides for reimbursement and funding for programs. Status: Public Act 93-0855 8/03/04

Amends the Residential Tenants’ Right to Repair Act. Provides that, if a repair is required under a residential lease agreement or required under a law, rule, or ordinance, and the reasonable cost of the repair does not exceed the lesser of $500 or one-half of the monthly rent, the tenant may notify the landlord in writing of the tenant’s intention to have the repair made at the landlord’s expense. Provides that, if the landlord fails to make the repair within 14 days or more promptly in an emergency, the tenant may have the repair made and, after submitting a paid bill to the landlord, deduct from his or her rent the amount of the bill, subject to specified limitations. Status: Public Act 93-0891 8/09/04

Amends the Criminal Identification Act. Provides that the sealing of the arrest and conviction records of the Department of State Police, the arresting authority, and the clerk of the circuit court is available to a person charged with, placed on supervision for, and convicted of a misdemeanor or Class 4 felony violation for prostitution, a misdemeanor or Class 4 felony possession violation of the Illinois Controlled Substances Act, or the Cannabis Control Act. Provides that the Illinois Department of Corrections, in cooperation with the Illinois Department of Employment Security, shall conduct a blind study utilizing a random sample of those who apply for the sealing of their criminal records under Public Act 93-211 relating to their employment history. Provides that the study shall be delivered to the chairpersons of the House and Senate judiciary committees no later than September 1, 2006. Status: Public Act 93-0891 8/09/04

Creates the Illinois African-American Family Commission Act. Establishes a 15-member Illinois African-American Family Commission to guide the efforts of and collaborate with the Department on Aging, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Public Aid, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Transportation, and others to improve and expand existing human services and educational and community development programs for African-Americans in the state. Provides that the Commission shall be funded through appropriations made for its purposes to these collaborating state departments. Sets forth guidelines for appointment and term length of Commission members. Provides that the Commission shall annually report to the governor and the General Assembly on the Commission’s progress toward its goals and objectives. Effective immediately. Status: Public Act 93-0867 8/05/04
Good morning. My name is Sonja Foster and I serve as the legislative liaison for the African-American Family Commission. The Commission was created in 1994, and our mission is to advocate for and develop policies, plans, and programs that promote family preservation and strengthen African-American communities. It is with this sense of purpose that the Commission is here to speak in support of improving Illinois juvenile expungement laws and HB 1091.

The issue of juvenile expungement is very important to the African-American community because many of our children and youth are or will be affected by the Illinois criminal justice system. According to the Sentencing Project, one-third of all African-American males aged 20-29 in the United States are under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system. Studies show that African-Americans are over-represented in the juvenile justice system. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention commissioned a study of 42 states to determine whether they were incarcerating minority youths at greater rates than white youths. All but one state concluded that minorities were over-represented in locked detention and correctional facilities. Over the past decade, the juvenile inmate population in Illinois has grown from 1,278 in 1991 to 2,214 in 1999, an increase of 73%. Fifty-six percent of these juvenile inmates are African-American.

Once in prison, juvenile offenders experience stress and trauma as a result of being separated from their family and living in overcrowded facilities. Juvenile offenders are also increasingly detained in adult institutions. The Corrections Yearbook, an annual survey on the state of America's prisons, indicates that juvenile inmates in adult prisons are more likely to be referred for medical attention due to assault than juvenile inmates in juvenile institutions. Because they are the victims of physical and sexual assault, these inmates have a high rate of committing suicide while incarcerated.

When juvenile inmates have finished serving their sentence, they often re-enter the environments that contributed to their incarceration. If familial relationships are strained or no longer exist, juveniles must then fend for themselves. Therefore, they may need to have access to basic necessities such as housing, employment, and educational opportunities. In an ideal world, a person would receive opportunities to achieve or maintain self-sufficiency in spite of having a criminal record. However, in today's society, this usually isn't the case. The stigma of being an offender affects an individual's ability to obtain the above-mentioned necessities. Having a criminal record can be especially difficult for juveniles because this record hangs over them even before they reach adulthood.

As a result, many of these individuals tend to recidivate, or return to criminal behavior. Research has shown that juveniles who recidivate establish a criminal history and are therefore subject to longer, harsher sentencing. As the number of juvenile inmates increases, more money is needed to house them. The State of Illinois spends an average of $59,000 per offender per year. At one facility, Kewanee, the State of Illinois spends as much as $100,000 per offender per year.

The African-American Family Commission believes that one way to address the problems facing African-Americans in the juvenile justice system is to expand and improve the current juvenile expungement laws in Illinois. Juvenile expungement legislation, such as HB 1091, sponsored by Representative Lovana Jones, takes a positive step in helping juveniles clear their criminal record. Removing the stigma associated with a criminal record opens doors of opportunity to juveniles. Thus, the occurrence of crime decreases in our communities and less of our children end up incarcerated, perhaps for the second or third time.

The current law states that whenever any person has attained the age of 17 or whenever all juvenile court proceedings relating to that person have ended,
 whichever comes later, the person may petition the court to expunge law enforcement records relating to incidents occurring before his or her 17th birthday, or to expunge his or her juvenile court records, or both, but only in the following circumstances: 1) the minor was arrested and no petition for delinquency was filed with the clerk of the circuit court; 2) the minor was placed under supervision pursuant to Section 5-615, and the order of supervision has since been successfully terminated; or 3) the minor was adjudicated for an offense that would be a Class B misdemeanor if committed by an adult.

Also, a juvenile may petition the court to expunge his or her law enforcement records relating to any incidents occurring before his or her 17th birthday that did not result in proceedings in criminal court, and to expunge any juvenile court records of proceedings that resulted in adjudications, but only if the person has had no convictions since his or her 17th birthday, and 1) the person has attained the age of 21 years; or 2) five years have elapsed since the termination of all juvenile court proceedings or commitment to the Department of Corrections Juvenile Division.

HB 1091, sponsored by Representative Lovana Jones, is so important because it pushes for automatic expungement of these records, so that juvenile offenders won’t have to worry about whether they can afford to pay for fees associated with expungement of their records.

However, more must be done. Education on the issue of expungement is needed so that juvenile offenders and their families know that this option is available to them. Juveniles whose records are eligible for expungement must be informed of this option and must be educated on how to start the expungement process. Next, the African-American community must become educated on the issue of expungement and encouraged to advocate on behalf of our youth so that they will not be lost within the juvenile justice system. Finally, our legislators must be encouraged to sponsor and support legislation that will give juveniles a chance to clear their name and to make a positive contribution to society. Legislation such as the Juvenile Reform Act of 1998 does more harm than good in deterring juveniles from committing crimes. In fact, this legislation has resulted in, among other things, an increased number of juveniles being incarcerated in adult institutions.

In closing, I would like to say that the African-American Family Commission has been and will continue to be an advocate for expungement legislation, both for juveniles and adults. We believe that if a juvenile offender can start or continue his or her rehabilitation without the stigma of a criminal conviction, he or she may be less likely to become a repeat offender and more likely to become a productive member of society.

On behalf of the African-American Family Commission, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue, and if we can be of further assistance to you please let us know.

Testimony Presented by the African-American Family Commission To The Illinois Senate Education Committee Regarding High School Dropouts

January 8, 2004
James R. Thompson Center Chicago, Illinois

Good morning. My name is Terry A. Solomon and I am the Executive Director of the African-American Family Commission. The Commission was created in 1994, and our mission is to advocate for and develop policies, plans, and programs that promote family preservation and strengthen African-American communities. It is with this sense of purpose that the Commission thanks you for the opportunity to testify on such an important issue as students dropping out of high school.

The Illinois School Code defines a dropout as “any child removed in grades 1 through 12 whose name has been removed from the district enrollment roster for any reason other than his death, extended illness, graduation or completion of a program of studies and who has not transferred to another public or private school.”

The increasing number of students dropping out of
high school is an issue of great concern in the African-American and Hispanic communities. The Illinois State Board of Education reported that during the 2001–2002 school year, 36,373, or 6%, of the 595,349 students enrolled in public high schools dropped out. Thirty-nine percent of these students were African-Americans, 38% whites, 21% Hispanics, and 2% others. Statewide, African-Americans and whites were more likely to drop out of school than other ethnic groups.

However, the picture is quite different for the 98,938 students that attended Chicago public high schools during the same period. A total of 17,404 (17%) high school students dropped out. Sixty percent were African-Americans. African-Americans were six times more likely than whites to drop out of Chicago public high schools. Hispanics were three times more likely than whites to drop out of Chicago public high schools.

Various socioeconomic factors and public policy decisions contribute to this troubling high school drop out rate. On December 19, 2003, the Chicago Sun-Times published a report card on the progress of schools in the Chicago metropolitan area. This report showed that 84.9% of those attending Chicago public high schools are from low-income families. In comparison, only 37% of high school students across the state of Illinois are from low-income families.

Also contributing to the drop out rate are current state policies regarding suspension and expulsion. Current state law denies re-enrollment to any child above the age of 16 who has dropped out of school and cannot, because of age and lack of credits, attend classes during the normal school year and graduate before his or her birthday. Youth over 16 years of age who have been suspended or expelled often are unable to obtain the credits necessary to return to school.

Across the state, each school district develops its own suspension and expulsion policies. The Illinois State Board of Education reported that 29,068 high school students experienced suspension multiple times. Forty-seven percent were whites, 37% African-Americans, 14% Hispanics, and 1% others. In the Chicago public schools 1,476 high school students were suspended multiple times. Fifty-three percent were African-Americans, 35% Hispanics, 12% whites, and 1% others.

The total number of high school students expelled statewide totaled 1,651. Forty-three percent were African-Americans, 41% whites, 14% Hispanics, and 2% others. Within Chicago public schools, 448 high school students were expelled. Significantly, 77% were African-Americans, 27% whites, 14% Hispanics, and 4% others.

The Commission believes a relationship exists between the number of students suspended and expelled and high school drop out rates. There is great cause to be concerned about the high school drop out rate, particularly the disproportionate number of students dropping out of Chicago public high schools, which are predominately attended by African-Americans and Hispanics.

Historically, education has been viewed as the gateway for minorities to improve the quality of life for their families and to achieve the American dream. However, for many African-Americans and Hispanics attending high school in Illinois, this dream will not be realized. The consequences of the escalating high school dropout rates will place this dream beyond reach, and doom them and their children to a life of unrelenting struggle. Research has documented the negative effects of dropping out of high school. High school dropouts are three times more likely to face poverty and receive public assistance than high school graduates. High school dropouts are four times more likely to be unemployed than those who complete four or more years of college. Social psychologists believe that being unemployed has extensive destructive effects on psychological well-being. Researchers have noted that being unemployed can result in poor health habits, boredom, depression, and substance abuse.

Unemployment resulting from high dropout rates can also lead to criminal behavior. The African-
American Family Commission conducted a pilot study of 119 detainees at Cook County Jail in May of 2003. Sixty-one percent were male and 39% were female. Eighty-two percent were between the ages of 17 and 29; 14% were between the ages of 30 and 39; 4% were between the ages of 40 and 49. Seventy-eight percent were African-American, 12% Hispanic, 7% white, and 3% others. The results from that study showed that most of those included in the study had low levels of education. Indeed, 10% reported that they had dropped out of elementary school, 69% reported they had dropped out of high school, 20% reported they had received a high school diploma, and 1% reported they had graduated from college.

In closing, the African-American Family Commission recommends the immediate undertaking of steps to redress the increasing high school dropout rate of African-Americans and Hispanics. The African-American Family Commission believes that current state policies, such as those regarding suspension and expulsion, serve as a disincentive for students to graduate from high school. The Commission therefore recommends 1) the State Board of Education annually report the number of children by age, race, and education level who re-enroll in school after being suspended and expelled; 2) the creation of community-based services to help parents re-enroll children in school; 3) the creation of a task force to review suspension and expulsion policies statewide and to recommend changes; and 4) the increase of the mandatory age for a person to continue attending school from 16 to 18 years of age.

The escalating high school drop out rate places a huge economic and social burden on the citizens of Illinois. Unemployment, crime, poor physical and mental health are but a few of the consequences. Reducing dropout rates, thereby increasing educational attainment of a greater number of Illinois residents, will reduce the depletion of scarce and limited state resources.

On behalf of the African-American Family Commission, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue.
In FY 2004, the Child Watch Hotline served 43 families. Despite the fact that the Commission is primarily an advocacy organization, families still called for help. Many were in need of shelter, rental assistance, employment assistance, senior aid, parenting classes, and assistance with child welfare cases. AAFC staff referred these families to appropriate community services for assistance.

Child Watch is a program aimed at the prevention of child abuse and neglect. The Child Watch Help Line allows everyone in the community to get involved and protect children. This program empowers parents, family members, and concerned citizens, and protects vulnerable children.

<table>
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<th>Services Needed</th>
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<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental assistance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Operating Revenues for the African-American Family Commission totaled $490,427 for the twelve-month fiscal period from July 1, 2003 through June 30, 2004. This amount included grants totaling $488,900 from the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services, in-kind contributions in the amount of $1,025, and donations from other sources totaling $502.

Operating Expenses totaled $493,312 for the fiscal year. FY'04 operating expenses exceeded operating revenues by $2,885.
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