

LWVIL SOCIAL POLICY POSITIONS: INCOME ASSISTANCE

Support for income assistance and supportive services for all low-income individuals and families.

INCOME ASSISTANCE (1971, revised 1997): LWVIL believes that the federal government should bear primary responsibility for financing programs designed to meet the basic needs of individuals and families. LWVIL supports secondary state funding for income assistance and supportive services for all low-income individuals and families. The administration of income assistance and supportive services requires the recruitment, retention, and training of sufficient numbers of qualified personnel; clear guidelines for responsibility; adequate information systems; and program evaluation.

Background The LWVIL and the LWVUS conducted simultaneous studies of income assistance in 1971. The state position was inadvertently dropped an unknown number of years ago from *Where We Stand*, and was reinstated by delegates to the 1993 LWVIL Convention. The national position was updated and revised in 1988, and is now included under Meeting Basic Human Needs.

In 1996, at the direction of the state board, a statewide committee reviewed the LWVIL Income Assistance position. A revised position was adopted at the 1997 LWVIL Convention. This revision affirms that federal funding should be the primary source for income assistance; the State's role should be a strong secondary, not supplemental, source.

LWVIL action The League continually works for adequate grant levels and automatic cost-of-living increases, along with better salaries and a separation of clerical and casework staff functions for the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). LWV is concerned over the IDHS staff reductions in local offices resulting in less than quality services due to very high caseload responsibilities. LWVIL has supported retention of and increased funding for, assistance programs such as TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), food stamps, low-income utility payments, the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplemental food program and family planning programs. The League worked for a rewrite of the Illinois Public Aid Code and a strengthened emergency assistance system. The League supported legislation that gave an increase in the TANF grant to Illinois families.

At the federal level, the League opposed the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. This legislation ended the federal entitlement income support to all low-income families who meet eligibility criteria and shifted major responsibility for meeting basic human needs from the federal government to the states. Working in coalition with other advocacy organizations, LWVIL followed and responded to state welfare proposals and submitted comments on the Illinois Plan for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). League is concerned about possible proposals in the TANF reauthorization, i.e., increase in work hours, allowable

work activities, child care needs and the flexibility provided to the states to work with caseload recipients moving to work and out of poverty, as well as the proposed increase in number of required work hours. League's concerns continue to focus on the need for additional jobs with sufficient wages and supportive services (accessible quality child care; education and job training; transportation and housing; benefits for legal immigrants and single, childless adults; and the need for adequate data to assess the impact of welfare changes over time). League remains concerned that all eligible residents are able to access benefits for which they qualify.

During 1996-97, the League monitored and provided input into the state human services reorganization process.

In 1999, the League advocated for the passage and funding of the Illinois Equal Justice Act designed to help lower-income families navigate the complex legal system on such civil matters as Medicaid, food stamps and illegal evictions.

LWVIL supported legislation during the spring 2003 legislative session to establish a refundable state earned income tax credit (EITC), a critical form of income assistance to help working families make the transition from welfare to work. League worked in coalition with Voices for Illinois Children and other organizations on a long-term educational and advocacy campaign to enact a state EITC.

League supports the Voices for Illinois Children's Budget and Tax Policy Initiative that identifies spending policies in legislation that affect children and families. League continues to support effective child support guidelines and collection efforts.

The League works in partnership with the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability and Housing Action Illinois for a broad voice in social policy.

LWVIL continues to work with coalitions to improve the well-being of low-income families through monitoring reauthorization of TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), WIA (Workforce Investment Act) and the Food Stamp program.

LWVIL continues to work towards adequate levels of funding to allow increased assistance programs such as TANF [Temporary Assistance to Needy Families], food stamps, low-income utility payments, the WIC [Women, Infants and Children] supplemental food program and family planning programs, affordable housing, transportation availability and employment and education programs.

As in the past we advocate for quality services in the IL Department of Human Services around the State which means caseworkers who are highly trained with caseloads which can allow for quality services for the family. In the past, the League worked for a rewrite of the IL Public Aid Code and a strengthened emergency assistance system.

While there was a small TANF increase in 2008, the economic climate since has not allowed for jobs paying a livable wage to support the families to bring the family's income above the poverty level. In addition, affordable housing opportunities are fewer due to a drop in voucher opportunities and higher rents which has increased the numbers of homeless individuals and families with children needing services.

Cuts in the IL budget have meant a loss in crucial services to vulnerable families and

individuals when those services are most needed. Education and training to produce a skilled workforce prepared for the competitive modern job market have not kept up with the need of those individuals living in poverty.

In addition, League is concerned with the need for supportive services such as quality child care, benefits for legal immigrants and single, childless adults and services for the disabled, young and adult.

We continue to support a refundable state earned income tax credit increase and the effective Workforce Investment Act.

League has worked in partnership with Voices for IL Children, Housing Action IL, National Low Income Housing Coalition, Illinois Works for the Future as well as the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability and other advocates for our issues at the State and Federal levels. In addition, we have joined the Responsible Budget Coalition to regain funding for services to lower income families and individuals in Illinois.