



CHICAGO JOBS COUNCIL

A Supplement to the CJC Policy Paper:

*Critical Issues & Initial Answers: Recommendations for Reauthorization of the
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program*

Feedback from the Frontlines:

Testimony to the US House Committee on Education and the Workforce
from Chicago Advocates, Providers & TANF Participants

September 2001

Testimony for the House Committee on Education and the Workforce Hearing on Welfare Reform: An Examination of Effects

*Submitted by the
Chicago Jobs Council
September 28, 2001*

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

For twenty years, the Chicago Jobs Council (CJC) has worked to expand the job opportunities of those at the greatest disadvantage in Chicago and Illinois. Our work is driven by the front-line experience of our nearly 100 members; community-based organizations and advocates who provide a wide range of employment and support services to unemployed or underemployed adults and youths seeking economic stability and work integrity, and who offer analysis and perspective on policy issues affecting the lives of the poorest city and state residents. Propelled by our mission and members, CJC has been actively involved in efforts to shape the design and implementation of welfare reforms at the local and state levels. We have engaged in on-going discussion and collaborative initiatives with the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development in Chicago and the Illinois Department of Human Services, and advocacy with state and national lawmakers. Our efforts have contributed to the creation of vital aspects of Illinois' Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) system including: Work Pays, the state's earnings disregard program; Illinois' significant investment in childcare for low-income families; and the state's commitment to "stop the clock" for individuals working 30 hours or more.

This testimony is grounded in the lessons we have learned from Illinois' implementation of the TANF block grant program, our members' expertise in moving welfare participants and other low-income families into the workforce and out of poverty, and the daily experience of thirty-one TANF recipients and service providers, who recently participated in five focus groups conducted by the Chicago Jobs Council.¹

The Chicago Jobs Council asserts that any further welfare reform and reauthorization must address the needs of poor families, many of whom will require additional services both before and after employment, and some who may need longer-term assistance. The true measures of welfare reform success will be on-going poverty reduction and the development of a system that supports families toward self-sufficiency.

¹ CJC member organizations that engaged clients or case managers in the focus groups included: New Moms, Inc., a program that provides housing, family support, and employment services to teen mothers; the Chicago Area Project's Women in Transition program, providing family support and employment services to several public housing developments on the South Side; Chicago Commons Employment and Training Center and Asian Human Services, programs providing distinct neighborhood, immigrant, and refugee populations with broad family support, English, literacy, and employment services.

The Chicago Jobs Council makes six recommendations for welfare policy in 2002 and beyond.

1. Preserve and improve the safety net for both working and nonworking individuals and families facing employment barriers.

A 1999 survey of 481 families living in Chicago homeless shelters found that 44 percent of respondents had TANF cash benefits stopped or reduced, and 33 percent had no source of income at all, including Food Stamps and Medicaid. Thirty-four percent said getting a job was the reason benefits were terminated, however, 82 percent of those who had gotten a job were no longer working.² Current and former TANF participants in the focus groups the Chicago Jobs Council conducted explained their vulnerable positions in the economy and their efforts to manage below poverty level incomes:

“I receive \$300 and I have to pay \$400 in rent. I have worked before. . . . Sometimes I cannot buy things for my daughters. Sometimes when they are sick, I can’t pay for medication. If I don’t pay the rent, I lose my apartment. Some medications the medical card doesn’t cover. Sometimes I don’t have enough money for food. Right now, I have not received Food Stamps for a month. I don’t have any food at my house. I was feeding my baby only with water and sugar because I didn’t have milk at home.”

Raely, a TANF recipient of 2 ½ years and mother of three young children

“Sometimes I paid the rent late and the landlord was after me, screaming at me. Medicaid doesn’t cover the medications my husband needs. I have to ask for a loan to buy his medication. My gas bill is over \$1000 in debt. I asked DHS if they can help with this bill and they stated that there were no funds available. My light bill is also behind. I have so much debt that what I receive is not enough. . . . Three months ago they cancelled my case. According to them I missed an appointment. They sent me a letter that I never received. . . . I had to reapply all over again, going through all the paper work. The waiting period was one month. I had to ask a family member for help. I had to talk to the landlord. He asked us to leave the apartment.”

Christina, TANF recipient with limited English skills, two children, and a husband with health problems

“I get \$125 worth of Food Stamps and I get \$75 worth of cash. And I guess that’s to make up the difference whatever a family of three is supposed to get. But since the last month, I have been cut down to three days. So right now, it’s not enough money.”

Ernie, TANF recipient with two children, reflecting on her recent employment income and benefits

“I’ll tell you like this about me, if nothing else gets paid, the rent’s going to get paid. Because I can go beg a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I can go over into somebody’s house and say can I get some rice or a bag of potatoes for 99 cents and we’ll go with that. You know what I’m saying? I’ve always tried to keep the roof. The lights might have went off a few times, you know. We might not have had a phone a few times, you know. We wasn’t into the cable thing, you know, but as far as anything when you got five kids, you keep that roof over their heads even if your house __ I’ve been in friends’ homes where the whole house is like a bedroom. You walk in the door, somebody’s bed is here, somebody’s bed is there, somebody’s bed is there. . . . You’re not looking at your couch and your table and all that. That’s like luxuries. We ain’t going there. You know what I’m saying? The most that you might buy is you might say let me go get me a \$2 or \$3 iron.”

Ms. Mac, welfare recipient of several years, mother of five children ranging in age from 22 through 4

We recommend that states be required to periodically review and provide a level of income support that is at least sufficient to ensure adequate housing, nutrition and health care for a family or individual, regardless of family size, criminal background, immigration status, or parental/custodial status. Additionally, states must ensure that families and individuals have

² Dworkin, J. 2000. “Families Hardest Hit: Effects of Welfare Reform on Homeless Families,” Chicago Coalition for the Homeless in collaboration with the National Welfare Monitoring and Advocacy Partnership.

access to income supports that might prevent job loss, or promote skill development toward self-sufficiency.

2. Build flexibility into policies to promote the creative and effective engagement of TANF recipients with various strengths and barriers in the process of moving from welfare to work.

The current Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload presents increasingly complex educational, social and medical needs that rapid employment will not address or tolerate. The Illinois Families Study First-year Report revealed that only 58% of respondents were high school graduates, 34% reported housing problems, 22% rated their overall health as poor and fair, 10% had one or more children expelled from school, and 22% had some history of domestic violence.³ CJC focus group participants reflected on their situations and their experiences with the TANF system in these words:

“The majority of clients state that the IDHS office fails to look at their individual barriers. The IDHS caseworker is focused on getting them a job and nothing else. The caseworkers do not appear concerned about the clients needs, and are mainly concerned about getting them into a placement where they can fulfill their monthly requirements. Clients have stated to me that it seems most important that the caseworkers get them into someplace where they will no longer be responsible for the client. Often, IDHS will classify a client as “engaged” which means they have work experience, however, after we do our assessment with the client, we find out that they are illiterate, have no work experience, are in a violent relationship or have unaddressed substance abuse issues.”

Provider of employment services

“I went to public aid and I took a letter from St. Patrick [church] and I told them, look I want to work. It’s not like I don’t want to work and it’s not like I don’t want to go to school . . . It’s just that I can’t. I can’t. My son’s been kicked out of one or two daycares; I have letters that say that he has a disability. I put him on the school bus. I have to be on that school bus. There’s times when they call me twice a week and say I have to sit there with him in school, you know. . . . And every time I had a job, I had a lot of jobs but I’ll be there for a week or three days, why? Your son’s doing this, come get your child; it’s not like I haven’t tried.”

Erika, TANF recipient and survivor of domestic violence, who has a 4½ year-old son with a behavioral disability, a younger daughter, and is currently pregnant

“But the thing is we are going to job fairs here, you know and then they say that we don’t want to work. All we want to do is lay around and receive the check. That’s not true. We’ll go on job fairs. No one calls us. We do applications everywhere. I put resumes all over the world. No one has called me yet.”

Ann J., TANF recipient of several years with three adolescent sons

“Some people can’t learn as fast as others and it might take them a little longer. . . . There might be a reason that they might have to stop for like a month or two of going because maybe their kid got sick or they got hurt or something. But give them a chance to, you know finish education.”

Darlene, TANF recipient of several years, two of her three children have a health problem or disability

“They should . . . evaluate your individual needs Don’t just lump us under one umbrella and say well, well all you all going to go to this same class and then some of you all going to make it and some are not and who cares.”

Vinetta, TANF recipient and mother of four children

³ Lewis, D., Shook, K., Stevens, A., Kleppner, P., Lewis, J. and Riger, S. 2000. “Work, Welfare, and Well-Being: An Independent Look at Welfare Reform in Illinois, Illinois Families Study Project Description and First Year Report,” University Consortium on Welfare Reform.

Policies and programs must support and encourage those who are truly ready to find employment, while providing more intensive and longer-term support to those who face major, and often multiple, barriers to employment.

We recommend that there be no lifetime limit on the receipt of cash assistance, supportive services, or education and training. Any family or noncustodial parent in need must be able to receive a thorough and professional assessment of their strengths and needs in order to develop a plan for achieving self-sufficiency. Appropriate tools such as screening devices for substance abuse, domestic violence, and learning disabilities, as well as, assessments of physical and mental health, literacy and basic skills must be available in addition to various options for work activity and skill development to facilitate the identification and achievement of incremental steps toward economic and family stability. These steps, reflecting progress for an individual or family, must be rewarded, not required.

The particular needs of youth, noncustodial parents, and domestic violence survivors must be recognized. Youth specialists who understand the stages of adolescent development must serve youth up to age 21 as they grapple with TANF rules and the possible pathways to self-sufficiency. States must include welfare-to-work strategies that assist noncustodial parents in their efforts to overcome employment barriers and become more involved in the lives of their children. Individuals facing or fleeing domestic violence in any state must have the greater flexibility described in the Family Violence Option.

3. Value education and training as an essential element to poverty reduction.

States' efforts to make TANF participants "work first" do not provide lasting solutions to either caseload or poverty reduction. Even during the previous economic boom that helped many find jobs, those who leave welfare for work without a high school diploma are twice as likely to return to welfare.⁴ Eighty-three percent of respondents in the Illinois Families Study stated a desire to pursue additional job skills or an educational goal.⁵ This desire was frequently repeated in our focus groups:

"I need childcare, to learn English, get a GED and get some kind of training. And I need to learn how to search for a good job."

Christina, TANF recipient

"From the Women In Transition program I went to a hospitality class. From the hospitality class I started work at the Palmer House and I've been there ever since. It'll be a year on the 11th of this month."

Vinetta, mother of four and a licensed cook, who lost her previous job due to an arm injury and returned to the TANF rolls

"Okay, if you go on a job for like say typing or receptionist, and you're going to work this job, you're working there two months. And these people aren't paying you. I figure that if you're going there, they should __ for them to have you to come there, they should have some kind of expectation on hiring. You see what I'm saying? Don't have a person come to your job, work three months. You're not paying them. You're getting paid by the [IDHS] which might be, like I said, with one child \$200 and something for that whole month, just this set payment. And

⁴ Based on Illinois' recidivism rates as reported in: Anderson, S. and Halter, A. 1999. "When Families leave Welfare Behind: First Survey Findings, Illinois Families in Transition," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for Illinois Department of Human Services.

⁵ Ibid. Lewis et al.

you working there and working there thinking that, well, I might get hired here because I've been working her. I got the experience. I've been working here three months. . . . And then they say 'well, we've decided we have enough people here, and we're not hiring right now.'

Ms. Mac, TANF recipient

"I have a person come to my program. She have reading level 10.9. I want that woman to go to college. Because it's guaranteed that woman will be successful and that woman will become self-sufficient."

Lillian, bi-lingual employment services provider

We recommend that a range of short- and long-term education (e.g. adult literacy and basic skills, English language proficiency, GED, post-secondary education, etc.), employability development, and occupational skills training programs (including self-employment programs) be fully funded, and made available to meet the varied interests and workforce preparation needs of job seekers. Additionally, a range of employment-related services must also be fully funded and made available to both youth and adults including volunteer experience, life skills/self-esteem development, on-the-job training programs, paid work experience in the private sector, publicly-funded jobs, entrepreneurial development, and one-on-one job placement and retention services.

Post-placement services are essential and should include: job counseling; reassessment to examine education, training and other employment barriers for those having difficulty retaining employment or needing additional skill development to advance their career mobility; career development services which focus on preparing individuals for career paths (including non-traditional employment) that ensure progression toward or achievement of sustainable wages and opportunities for advancement.

4. Make work pay with a range of job- and income-related supports.

As indicated previously, even though parents who leave welfare for work are employed full-time or nearly full-time, their below-poverty wages, averaging \$7.00 per hour in Illinois, are too little to support their families.⁶ Many of these same families also fail to receive key work supports including childcare assistance, Medicaid coverage, and Food Stamps despite their continued eligibility for this help.⁷ The approximately one million welfare participants entering the labor force join more than seven million workers who are poor and another 13 million workers at chronic risk of falling into poverty.⁸ The current and former TANF participants we talked to were familiar with limited incomes and access to resources:

"Okay you get a job right. I mean it ain't paying you no great money, seven something an hour. You're working 40 hours a week. You're living in an apartment paying 500 something dollars rent, light, gas. You can't__and you've got children to take care of and they just cut you off all at once. . . . Okay you've got to be under a certain amount and they might still give you a little money and stamps. But people with one child it don't make no difference how much you make, you're going to make more than what they're going to give you a month. So therefore they're going to take the money."

Darlene, reflecting on TANF work supports

⁶ Ibid. Lewis et al.

⁷ Sweeney, E., Schott, L., Lazere, E., Fremstad, S., Goldberg, H., Guyer, J. 2000. "Windows of Opportunity: Strategies to Support Low-Income Families in the Next Stage of Welfare Reform," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

⁸ Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development. 2000. "Welfare Reform and Beyond: Making Work *Work*, A Policy Statement by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development," Committee for Economic Development.

“It’s big, big problem get again medical because I try. My husband and me started with \$8 an hour and wasn’t enough for pay the insurance. [My husband’s employer] insurance after three months to get benefits and I after six months. And we try to get, no get; [IDHS] told us no.”

Mubera, Bosnian refugee, who received TANF cash assistance and Food Stamps, with her husband and two children, for six months before employment

“ . . . by me being still the lowest person on the totem pole at my work, I have hours like the night hours, traveling. Like sometimes I work from 5:30 until 2:00 in the morning or from 6:00 until 2:30 in the morning. . . . Okay by me working the hours that I work, I would feel better if I had somebody there with my daughter, you know what I’m saying, she’s 13. . . . you know I would like if somebody was there with her that I could pay to be there, instead of using all my money to have to pay the bills and stuff like that.”

Vinetta, expressing her desire for childcare support for 13 year olds

“ . . . so I applied for child support and out of child support, my baby’s father works a good job. I don’t know why I get 25 bucks a month. It’s a kid and I have no idea. He makes at least a week \$500, what’s the point you know? I don’t know what’s going on.”

Erika, TANF recipient

The TANF program must maximize a range of supports that help current and former participants keep their jobs, move up in their careers, and permanently leave welfare, and poverty, behind.

We recommend that earnings disregard rules supporting gradual increases in income through work and transition toward self-sufficiency (such as Illinois’ Work Pays program) be part of an income maintenance plan and that state tax policies (such as the Earned Income Tax Credit) and asset accumulation strategies (such as Individual Development Accounts) be integrated to support low-wage workers until they can obtain employment at sustainable wages. Additionally, states must allow the “pass through” of all child support collected and disregard this income when determining eligibility for any public assistance program.

States must provide transportation help, including commuting allowances, funds to purchase or maintain a car, and coordination with paratransit systems; and a seamless system of child care for all low-income workers during traditional and nontraditional hours and for those with special needs. In order to prevent job loss, states must provide short-term aid to low-income workers facing temporary crises, such as a care breakdown or the illness of a child, that can jeopardize economic and family stability.

States must ensure that Food Stamps and Medicaid are provided to eligible low-income individuals and families and must expand health care coverage for low-income workers not eligible for Medicaid.

While policymakers must encourage employer’s cooperation in public efforts to expand employee support services including child care, transportation, employee assistance services, training and advancement opportunities, and workplace flexibility, those supports provided by the states must be universally available according to income and continue to be based on means.

5. Measure, reward and monitor states according to participants’ meaningful educational, personal and employment gains.

Current federal TANF law measures states’ performance primarily by caseload reduction. As a result, states have focused their welfare-to-work efforts on reducing the size of their caseloads rather than identifying and addressing families’ employment barriers. In Illinois the “available to

work” caseload has declined nearly 78 %, ⁹ yet only 53% surveyed in the Illinois Families Study report they are working. ¹⁰ Thousands who are without work have been either discouraged from applying for needed assistance, or cut off of assistance in the absence of efforts to identify and address literacy, domestic violence, mental health or disability-related barriers. Focus group participants shared their own insights and experiences of the system’s caseload reduction efforts:

“When I was six months pregnant I went to the public aid office . . . I went in there and the man who, that processed my application said that he went into the new supervisor, she’s going to take care of it immediately and in 30 days I would get a check. A month and a half later, I got back to the public aid office. I had to reapply with a woman who only took care of Food Stamps and not cash assistance. She didn’t process my application either so we went on my birthday I went and I had to apply again with a man who said that he was going to do everything for me. I would be approved immediately. I shouldn’t worry. . . Two weeks before I was due I started calling him because I hadn’t heard anything from public aid, I got the run around. I called him and left him four messages a day for two weeks even on the weekends and he never returned any of my calls. Finally two days before my due date I went in and I was told that nobody from the beginning had put any of my information into the computer, that I had to wait to be approved. . . . So then the supervisor of that man came in and started threatening me saying that why did I need [TANF]? Was I sure I needed it? I could start working, I could do this, I could do that. And then a few days later I was told to talk to two more people who were supposed to handle my case. By this time I had, I was about to go into the hospital because I was like in really strong labor and they wanted me to come in so that they could try to interview me again. And I was scared that I was going to have to wait another 45 days, that I couldn’t wait because I couldn’t afford to buy anything for my daughter for another 45 days. But they did finally give me the money. . . .”
Rebekah, recent TANF recipient with 2½ month-old daughter, reflecting on her application experiences

“. . . when you go to your appointment [with IDHS] they’re the ones doing all the talking. You’re trying to tell them your situation and they’re telling you something else, what they want to hear. So what they need to do is they need to take time, take pride. You know what I’m saying they need to put their clients first instead of themselves first before they assume and [have you] jump through hoops.”
Kisha, TANF recipient and mother of one child, whose entry-level employment led to the loss of cash benefits and her apartment

“The first time I went and applied, my caseworker, well the caseworker I have now is not the one I applied with. But the first person I talked to when I went and applied after my unemployment ran out made me feel like I was the lowest person in the world because I had got laid off my job. And because I had to come and beg them for some assistance. . . . [TANF] was out there for us, for help for us so why not give it to us until we can do better. Not make us feel like we’re a part of a piece of scum under their shoe.”
Kathy, mother of one son, employed previously in a law office for 18 years

“How can this program be successful? When so many people don’t have food out there. There are a lot of people who need the assistance who have no food for their kids. Because so many cases have been cancelled. They have been cut off. There is no way this program can be successful. . . . The government called it successful, but the people who have lost benefits call it hunger.”
Benigma, TANF recipient with one child and a 30 year work history

We recommend that program success be measured and rewarded according to a meaningful standard of self-sufficiency that is adjusted for regional and local differences such as the Wider Opportunities for Women’s *Self-Sufficiency Standard*, which estimates the minimum amount of income a family needs to satisfy its basic needs without relying on public or private assistance. ¹¹

⁹ Illinois Department of Human Services.

¹⁰ Ibid. Lewis et al.

¹¹ Wider Opportunities for Women has developed *Self-Sufficiency Standards* for each county in 13 states as well as the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The Chicago Workforce investment Board recently adopted the *Illinois Self-Sufficiency Standard* to determine eligibility for training services and to use as a performance measurement under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

Performance measures to be tracked and collected longitudinally must include: interim indicators of educational advancement such as enrollment and class completion, interim indicators of housing and health stabilization, employment data including wages and benefits received, job retention and career advancement rates, the need for and use of continued government assistance/support from programs that determine eligibility at 200% of child poverty or less, the effects of case sanctioning, termination, and work activity requirements on family stability as indicated by entry into and outcomes from states' child welfare systems¹² and homeless shelters, the amount of child support received and passed-through to families, and indicators of success in serving youth including completion of secondary education and all other measures indicated above.

States must be encouraged to use sector-specific labor market data to effectively anticipate, prioritize and invest in training and education programs that meet the demands of the labor market and be rewarded for their success in helping job seekers achieve self-sufficiency and reducing poverty.

Family structure goals of TANF must be eliminated and funds used to reward states for decreasing out-of-wedlock births and for abstinence only until marriage programs must be redirected to rewarding states for reducing poverty and empowering youth to make informed career and reproductive decisions.

States must have an obligation to reach out to individuals and families whose incomes are at or below 200% of poverty in order to assess their eligibility for public assistance. Those receiving TANF must be accorded due process, which includes timely notice, a reassessment, and an opportunity for a fair hearing before any reduction in benefits or termination. Some mechanism to periodically evaluate states' programs in order to ensure that policies are applied nondiscriminatorily is necessary.

6. Invest in the nation's workforce with increased funding for education, training and work-related supports.

Welfare funding needs to be increased, or at least maintained, to provide critical support to families who either have left welfare for low-wage jobs or have remained on the caseload due to severe employment barriers. Illinois, as well as other states, has spent all of its TANF block grant and MOE funds on needed initiatives, such as subsidized childcare, the child welfare system and other social service programs, and would be seriously hurt by funding cutbacks. Despite their investment in needed services, states' fiscal constraints still force them to choose between funding one program over another, often leaving to the wayside programs that help individuals make a permanent attachment to the workforce, like education and training. When our cyclic economy stalls, families who have been unable to permanently attach to the labor force because of limited work experience, low educational attainment, and multiple barriers to employment may return to TANF. The White House Council of Economic Advisors estimates

¹² Via comparisons of TANF and child welfare caseloads and family reunification rates within states' child welfare systems.

that for every one percent increase in unemployment there will be a five to seven percent increase in the TANF caseload.¹³

“I’m going to school, like I said I’ve got six months to get my associates and I can barely, you can barely find a job with college credits. . . . It’s an Associate’s degree in criminal justice. So and it’s hard to find a job right now. They’re cutting everybody’s hours.”

Ruth, Medicaid only recipient who is working and going to school, reflecting on these economic times

“What will happen now that all the placements are frozen, due to what happened on September 11th? They’re not hiring. We have a contract with [an airport security firm]. They’re not going to hire. What will happen. . . ? That’s a concern I have in terms of the economy. Things are not getting better, it’s getting worse. And we have been having that concern even before what happened Tuesday. It will be much worse now.”

Lillian, bi-lingual employment services provider

We recommend that MOE and TANF block grant levels be increased, at least to adjust for inflation, in order to mitigate the employment barriers of both working and nonworking TANF participants. Additionally, any savings states realize from a decrease in income assistance must be reinvested in the workforce system’s education, training, retention and support services to fulfill low-income individuals’ and families’ unmet needs.

States must be measured by how they spend their MOE and provided a bonus for expenditures proven to reduce poverty such as allocations to education and training programs, state Earned Income Tax Credits, and Individual Development Accounts, meeting a standard that raises an income to at least 200% of the poverty level.

Because education and training are strategies proven to give people access to jobs that pay higher, sustainable wages, local, state and federal governments must appropriate TANF and other funding to support the workforce system’s ability to provide lifelong learning opportunities.

Vinetta, mother of four and periodic welfare recipient, currently working full time told us,

“It’s like the more they’re trying to change [welfare], the more they are forgetting people.”

Welfare law should be written in response to the needs of families experiencing economic hardship. Poverty reduction is the only acceptable goal of a welfare system. Employment preparation, skill development, and job placement and retention services are vital means to this necessary end.

We ask that the House Committee on Education and the Workforce give our six recommendations and accompanying actions careful consideration. We expect our written testimony to become part of the public record on TANF reauthorization hearings.

¹³ Council of Economic Advisors. 1999. "Technical Report: Economic Expansion, Welfare Reform, and the Decline of Welfare Caseloads: An Update." Washington, D.C.: Executive Office of the President.

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Founded in 1981, the Chicago Jobs Council (CJC) is a membership organization that works to increase job opportunities for all city residents, with an emphasis on those in poverty, racial minorities, the long-term unemployed, women and others who experience systemic exclusion from employment and career mobility. With 18 original members, CJC has grown to include 100 community-based organizations (CBOs), civic groups, businesses and individuals committed to helping disadvantaged Chicagoans gain access to the jobs and training they need to enter the labor market, secure stable employment at a living wage, and pursue sustainable careers.

CJC pursues its mission through advocacy, applied research, public education and capacity-building initiatives focused on influencing the development or reform of public policies and programs. Our advocacy efforts are grounded in the perspectives of our members, who contribute their expertise as direct service practitioners, advocates, researchers and employers. CJC's efforts are also guided by the results of demonstration projects that test innovative solutions to pressing employment problems. By organizing members and other interested parties around workforce development, welfare reform, economic and community development issues, CJC fosters dialogue and cooperative strategies that effect change.



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