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## **MINORITY WORKING FAMILIES IN ILLINOIS FALLING BEHIND**

### ***Latino Immigrants at Greatest Risk; Study Concludes Illinois Can Address the Problem***

(CHICAGO) A sharp racial/ethnic divide has emerged within the world of low-income working families, posing a critical equity and economic challenge to Illinois and the nation, a new study concludes.

Unless decision makers in Illinois are willing to pursue policies that would improve conditions, African-Americans and Latinos will continue to emerge as a larger – but under-prepared and underpaid – segment of the workforce.

The disturbing portrait of America's low-income working families was sketched by the [Working Poor Families Project](#) based on new analysis of the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The Project's study sheds a fresh light on what's happening inside the world of the working poor, where adults are working hard but find it difficult if not impossible to get ahead. And at the bottom of America's economic spectrum, a stark divide has emerged between white and Asian families compared to black and Latino families.

"In 2013, working families headed by racial/ethnic minorities were twice as likely to be poor or low-income compared with non-Hispanic whites, a gap that has increased since the onset of the Great Recession in 2007," the authors write. "The significant differences among racial/ethnic groups present a critical challenge to ensuring economic growth and bringing opportunities to all workers, families and communities across the United States."

In Illinois, there are over 400,000 low-income working families, meaning their total income fell below 200 percent of the official poverty rate. Of that total, 46 percent of all minority working families are low-income (243,342) compared to only 19.6 of all white working families being low-income (161,759).

"This report describes the conditions of our current and future workforce. The disparities impact our economy and harm the fabric of Illinois communities," said Carrie Thomas, Executive Director of the Chicago Jobs Council. "Not only is it past time to address the growing divide, but our new Governor proposed a state budget that is already disproportionately affecting these same working families."

Latinos are particularly at risk because so many of their low-income working families include at least one immigrant parent, the data show. Despite a high work ethic, Latino immigrants are among the most

disadvantaged with lower earnings, less education and little healthcare. Nationally, some 14 million of the 24 million children who live in low-income working families belong to racial or ethnic minorities. This bodes poorly for the nation's future as children who grow up in low-income families face the very real prospect of never escaping poverty, the study finds.

Disparities cannot be erased overnight, but policymakers can start to reduce the gaps with a two-pronged approach that simultaneously increases access to education and training while enacting policies that "make work pay," the researchers assert. State governments have demonstrated success with policy initiatives including:

- Raising the minimum wage.
- Supporting programs that link education and training to career opportunities and helping English language learners.
- Increasing need-based financial aid for postsecondary education and expanding child care assistance and other supports for students with children.
- Extending Medicaid benefits to all who are eligible.
- Encouraging employers to provide paid sick leave for all workers.

"Providing all low-income families with the tools they need to succeed is critical to the long-term health of our state and nation," said Carrie Thomas. "So far, the new Governor's proposals will only deepen the economic challenges faced by working families. The report is another wake-up call to the real economic conditions faced by thousands of Illinois families."

"Low-Income Working Families: The Racial/Ethnic Divide," can be found on the Working Poor Families Project's website at [www.workingpoorfamilies.org](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org).

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*The **Chicago Jobs Council (CJC)** is a respected, collective voice on anti-poverty issues. As the only organization of its kind in the region, CJC advocates for training, education, and policy interventions proven to be effective in ensuring marginalized jobseekers have access to the workforce. Grounded in a commitment to solve the most difficult employment challenges, CJC promotes systemic solutions, never wavering in the face of adversity. For more information, visit [www.cjc.net](http://www.cjc.net).*

*The **Working Poor Families Project (WFPF)** is a national initiative designed to help working families achieve economic security by strengthening a variety of policies at the state level. The WFPF is supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ford Foundation, Joyce Foundation and Kresge Foundation. For more information, visit [www.workingpoorfamilies.org](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org).*